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**IMAGINING ḤUJJA:  
PROOF AND REPRESENTATION  
IN THE WORKS OF AL-SHAYKH  
AL-ṢADŪQ**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of literary and sectarian identities in the early Buwayhid Period (c. 945-1050), focussing on the work of the Imāmī Shī'ī scholar al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq. Al-Ṣadūq's works are compilations of the sayings (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet and the Imāms, whose recorded speech served as essential proof-texts for emerging legal and theological literature, as they continue to be to this day. However, the potential sacrality of the *ḥadīth* engendered fierce debates about how they could and should be treated by scholars, ranging from historiographical doubts about the reliability of their transmission to troubled epistemological speculation about the viability of an absent authority accessed only through text and anecdote.

The goal of this thesis is above all to illustrate the profound mimetic sophistication of compilation. Al-Ṣadūq's writings, like those of countless other *ḥadīth* compilers, contain little sustained prose or narrative, indeed little of al-Ṣadūq's own voice, rather they amass short anecdotes, aphorisms and commands attributed to the Prophet and the imāms. This has led to compilers being treated as mere tradents with no creative input or originality, judged only for their preservation of these texts for posterity. Conversely, this thesis demonstrates through sustained readings of al-Ṣadūq's writings how the selection and arrangement of material engenders semiosis of extraordinary sophistication.

Scholarship has overwhelmingly regarded *ḥadīth* as scripture, the prerogative of jurists and theologians with little relevance to literature and what are misleadingly termed 'secular' writings. In examining the art of compilation in al-Ṣadūq's approach to the *ḥadīth*, this thesis also challenges such artificial divisions, examining how his writings are just as engaged with the literary activities of his contemporaries as they are with theology and the law.

*Omen? omen? - the dictionary! If the gods think to speak outright to a man, they  
will honorably speak outright; not shake their heads, and give an old wives'  
darkling hint.*

*Moby Dick*

كيف بكم إذا سعدتم فلم تجدوا أحداً ورجعتم فلم تجدوا أحداً

محمد الباقر

ومن أين يحلم من لم ينم

الشريف الرضي

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## **INTRODUCTION – *Hadīth, Occultation & Compilation***

### **THE TRUTHFUL MASTER**

This thesis presents a study of the fourth/tenth-century Imāmī Shī'ī scholar Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā b. Bābawayh al-Qummī, better known as Ibn Bābawayh or by the honorific al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq ('the truthful master').<sup>1</sup> Al-Ṣadūq is best known as an early *ḥadīth* scholar of the Imāmīya, being the author of *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh* ('Every Man His Own Jurist'), one of what became the four canonical books of Imāmī *ḥadīth* and the second oldest.<sup>2</sup>

Despite his prominent, indeed canonical position in the earlier history of Imāmī Shī'ism<sup>3</sup> importance, al-Ṣadūq has received little scholarly attention. There is as yet no monograph devoted to the study of his work, nor even do we see him as the primary subject of article length studies.<sup>4</sup> Rather, he remains a component of studies whose focus lies elsewhere. Moreover, even here he has tended to occupy a marginal position, the clear reason for which

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter al-Ṣadūq.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that this canon was only fixed much later, around the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century. It is also the case that another work of al-Ṣadūq, *Madīnat al-'ilm*, was also included as a fifth book in the canon, but this was subsequently lost. When this exactly this happened remains obscure.

<sup>3</sup> Though his beliefs in the hidden, twelfth imām render him solidly a part of what we now call Twelver (*Ithnā' 'asharī*) Shī'ism, the tradition to whose canon he belongs, al-Ṣadūq refers to himself as an Imāmī Shī'ī. 'Imāmī' is an older term than Twelver, being a label that had been attached to Shī'ī groups since at least the second/eighth century. The second/eighth-century Imāmīya were the group out of which emerged a number of distinct Shī'ī groups including the Twelvers as well as the Nuṣayrīya and the Ismā'īliya. While a distinct Twelver Shī'ism clearly owes its origins to the point where a group of Imāmīs distinguished themselves by fixing the number of imāms at twelve, something that had already happened several decades before al-Ṣadūq, the term 'Twelver' had yet to emerge, and Imāmīs like al-Ṣadūq who believed in the occultation of the son of al-'Askarī simply saw themselves as the 'true' Imāmīs (see al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shī'a*, pp. 90-93), though doubtless other, differently inclined Imāmīs believed the same about themselves. However, it is clear that writers like al-Ṣadūq clearly saw Imāmīs who held other beliefs as their fellow Imāmīs. We read, for example, in the works on the question of the Twelfth Imām written by al-Ṣadūq and his father that the Imāmī faithful were 'confused' about this matter, clearly indicating an impulse among Imāmī scholars to solidify a homogenous orthodoxy on this point amongst a still heterogenous Imāmīya (See *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 31-34, Ibn Bābawayh the Elder, *al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣira*, pp. 7-9). When al-Ṣadūq talks about the Imāmīya, then, he is talking about himself, but he is also potentially talking about a group larger than those who adhere to what would become Twelver orthodoxy. In this thesis, therefore, we refer to al-Ṣadūq and his earlier and contemporary co-religionists as Imāmīs, while the term Twelver will be used only when it is necessary to specifically differentiate those Imāmīs who believed in the hidden, twelfth imām and when we are discussing the later Twelver tradition. For a discussion of the transition between these two names see Kohlberg *Imāmīyya*.

<sup>4</sup> An exception to this is Marcinkowski, which gives a brief introduction to al-Ṣadūq. The most complete survey of his works to date is that supplied by Newman. See Newman, *Twelver Shī'ism*, pp. 62-72.



is the correspondingly marginal position which he occupies in the accepted narratives of Imāmī history.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, this study seeks to demonstrate that the study of al-Ṣadūq has immense promise to shed light on the seething richness of later Abbasid religious and intellectual culture, as one of the foundational figures of Twelver Shī'ism, as scholar of *ḥadīth*, as a member of the Buwayhid court and as a writer of prodigious skill and ingenuity.

## BETWEEN ḤUJJA AND SUNNA - *Shī'ī Ḥadīth and Sunnī Ḥadīth*

The study of *ḥadīth* is now a venerable discipline in the academy. It remains, however, a discipline that is overwhelmingly dominated by the study of Sunnī *ḥadīth*, with Shī'ī *ḥadīth* having received only sporadic attention. While the situation has changed over the past three decades, which have seen marked expansion of Shī'ī studies as a field, the study of Shī'ī *ḥadīth* continues to be a discipline under construction. There as yet exists no book-length survey of Shī'ī *ḥadīth* literature, while introductions to Shī'ī *ḥadīth* thus far remain in the form of articles or appendices to introductions to Sunnī *ḥadīth*.<sup>6</sup> There now exist several excellent introductions to Shī'ī Islam, but in none of these does one find Shī'ī *ḥadīth* discussed as a discrete topic. The contrast with introductions to Islam is, of course, pronounced, wherein *ḥadīth* is usually afforded generous discussion.<sup>7</sup>

Not unlike other aspects of Shī'ī thought, Shī'ī *ḥadīth* confronts the scholar familiar with Sunnī intellectual traditions with a mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar. There remains, of course, substantial similarity between Sunnī and Shī'ī conceptions of what a *ḥadīth* is and how it is to be used. The text is usually supplied with an *isnād* that may be interrogated in terms of the reliability of the narrators it comprises, while the text may similarly be scrutinised and subject to a variety of paradigms of use depending on the persuasions of the reader; it may be interpreted as containing a general injunction or one confined to the specific context of the *ḥadīth*'s utterance, it may or may not be placed in contest with the deductions of human reason. Shī'ī and Sunnī groups differ on such questions, but not noticeably more so than they do

<sup>5</sup> The reasons for this will be discussed in detail in Chapter I.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'Sunnī' is far from unproblematic when used with reference to the period under discussion, referring to a set of divisions and identities that had yet to solidify at that time. Nonetheless, when discussing Imāmī thought and in particular Imāmī *ḥadīth* it retains a distinct utility. Imāmī writers are quite clear in their division of the Muslim community into Shī'īs and non-Shī'īs, the latter of which they usually refer to by the derogatory term *'awwām*; 'the masses'. 'Sunnī' serves as a convenient shorthand for 'non-Shī'ī,' with the added specificity that in al-Ṣadūq's context when we talk about non-Shī'īs we are indeed talking about those groups and ideas that were rapidly coalescing into a self-consciously united Sunnism, rather than other non-Shī'ī groups such as the Khawārij.

<sup>7</sup> See Haider *Introduction*; Newman, *Twelver Shī'ism*.

amongst themselves. Moreover, when viewed from a diachronic perspective such points of difference have changed dramatically over time. It is commonly said today that Duodeciman Shī'ī law gives a greater role to reason and a correspondingly reduced role to *ḥadīth* than Sunnī law, but we shall have ample opportunity to observe in the chapters that follow that in earlier periods there were many Shī'īs, least al-Ṣadūq himself who condemn Sunnīs and others for their excessive reliance on reason.

Despite these similarities in theory and practice, Shī'ī *ḥadīth* remains a corpus sharply differentiated from the Sunnī one.<sup>8</sup> The most conspicuous difference is the different authorities to whom the *aḥādīth* are traced. While Sunnī *ḥadīth* ultimately became restricted to the words of Muḥammad, Shī'ī *ḥadīth* came to accord equal sanctity to the words of various of the Prophet's descendants, with Duodeciman *ḥadīth* comprising the words of Muḥammad, the twelve imāms and Muḥammad's daughter Fatima. Not only is this a significant divergence of substance, it also points to a very different process of origins. The eventual Sunnī focus on prophetic *ḥadīth* is usually traced back to the third/ninth century, to the back-and-forth between traditionist and rationalist positions that dominated the very earliest stages of Islamic law and theology and to the resolution of that debate in formerly in figures like al-Shāfi'ī and latterly in the institutionalised schools of law. With Shī'ism, meanwhile, we can find ourselves confronting what seems a very different process. The idea of the Prophet's authoritative precedent as recorded in *ḥadīth* is inextricably tied to that of the imām, the living successor to the Prophet who inherits his full authority to instruct the Muslims in their religion. During the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, usually called the formative period of Sunnī law, a period which saw the careers not only al-Shāfi'ī but also no less illustrious *ḥadīth* scholars than al-Bukhārī and Muslim, Imāmī intellectual life still revolved around a succession of living imāms. Though as the third/ninth century progressed the imāms became less active presences in the life of the community, their authority increasing devolving to a network of scholars and agents, it is the conception of the imām and of his authority, rather than questions of *ḥadīth*-criticism and oppositions between text and reason, that dominates both modern scholarship of this period and the surviving literature. *Aḥādīth* are certainly in circulation amongst Imāmīs as early as anyone else, including both the words of their imāms and the words of the Prophet, but discussion of their status and use is eclipsed by discussion of the imām.

The picture is complicated further by the occultation of the Twelfth Imām. In 260/874 the eleventh Imām of the Imāmīya, al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, died in 874 aged 29, ostensibly leaving

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it has been said with some justification that it is their different *ḥadīth* corpora above all that have come to separate Sunnī and Shī'ī Islam. See e.g. Amir-Moezzi, 'Remarques', p. 5.

no male heir. With a prodigious swiftness, however, a significant number of the Imāmī faithful and their leaders adopted the position that he had, in fact, had a son, who was now in a state of hiddenness, or occultation (*ghayba*). It was also declared that he would one day return from this state of hiddenness, and do so as the triumphant messiah (*qā'im*) who would restore the rights of Muḥamad's house and bring a new era of just utopia in prelude to the Last Day. Over the course of the fourth/tenth century, Imāmī scholars established a narrative whereby there were two occultations: the first, the lesser occultation, wherein the Hidden Imām still communicated with a line of four successive emissaries (*saḡīrs*), and the second, greater occultation, wherein, following the last emissary's death in 941, the Imām was completely hidden from all until his promised but indefinitely deferred return. The absence of an accessible imām and the cessation of the Imāmī community's reliance on such a figure meant profound changes for Imāmī reckonings with the sources of salvific knowledge and thus with *ḥadīth*. Previously the option to consult an infallible, living guide had presented a potential alternative both to seeking authority in the recollected precedent of *ḥadīth* and to solving problems with independent reason. With the vanishing of this third option Imāmīs found themselves effectively in the same position as non-Shī'ī groups, ever more compelled to address in detail the dilemma of text versus reason that had been at the centre of the intellectual inquiries of other groups for over a century, but which amongst the Imāmīya had thus far been overshadowed by explorations of the idea of direct, inspired authority.<sup>9</sup>

It is precisely at this time, at the end of the third/ninth century, that we see the first large-scale, systematic *ḥadīth* compendia appear amongst Imāmīs. The imāms' words had been written down before in small collections, often by disciples of the imāms who recorded what they heard<sup>10</sup> but it is around the time of al-'Askarī's death that we see appearing large, structured collections after the familiar model of a *ḥadīth* compendium. Some of the authors of these works (e.g. al-Ṣaffār, al-Barqī) had been companions of the last imāms, but the *aḥādīth* they compiled were not restricted to the words of the imāms they had met, but gathered the words of the earlier imāms back to 'Alī and of the Prophet, words that were transmitted by a host of narrators and not by any living imām.

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<sup>9</sup> The events surrounding al-'Askarī's death have been the subject of a considerable number of studies over the past three decades. This increasing volume of scholarship notwithstanding, beyond the facts of al-'Askarī's death and the eventual acceptance of the narrative of two occultations and four emissaries narrative over the course of the tenth century, the history of this development in the Imāmī community is deeply contentious. The question of when exactly the several components of what became the standard position became generally accepted is not easy to answer. By the time al-Kulaynī completed *al-Kāfī* in the 930's the doctrine of the twelfth, hidden, messianic Imām seems established, however the eventual orthodoxy regarding the emissaries may not have solidified until the close of the tenth century. See Modarressi, *Crisis*; Kohlberg, '*Imāmiyya*'; Klemm, '*Vier Sufarā*', Abdulsater, Arjomand, '*Crisis*'; '*Imam Absconditus*'; '*Consolation*'; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*; Hayes.

<sup>10</sup> Kohlberg, '*Uṣūl*'.

The genesis of a distinct, Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus is thus intimately tied to the changes in circumstance and doctrine that surrounded the death of the eleventh imām and the onset of the idea of occultation. The idea of salvation found in the guidance of a single, living leader, an idea about which lingered aspirations to political change and an idea that still lay at the foundation of other Shīʿī groups,<sup>11</sup> retreated in favour of models of salvation based on hermeneutics, on the study of God's will as manifest in a group of texts, on the efforts of scholars and the recollection of the past.

## THE SHĪʿĪ CENTURY

These significant doctrinal developments which characterise the Imāmī experience of the late third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries were meanwhile accompanied by profound political changes that took place over the course of the fourth/tenth century, changes which would in turn produce dramatic alterations in the group's circumstances. The period between c. 340/950 and 440/1050 is often called the Shīʿī century,<sup>12</sup> owing to the unprecedented subsequently surpassed political ascendancy of Shīʿī groups during its course. North Africa, Egypt and later much of the Levant came under the dominion of the Ismāʿīlī Fāṭimids, who established a fully-fledged Shīʿī imām-caliphate to rival that of the Abbasids. In Syria, meanwhile, the Ḥamdānīd dynasty of Aleppo were rulers with strong Shīʿī leanings. Though their affiliations do not seem to have much impinged on their statecraft (relations with the Abbasids remained unexceptional), their short-lived dominance nonetheless allowed Aleppo and its environs to become an important centre of Shīʿī activity that saw a considerable traffic of important Shīʿī thinkers, including Imāmīs.<sup>13</sup>

For the Imāmīya, for Imāmī *ḥadīth* and, indeed, for al-Ṣadūq, the most important Shīʿī power of this century was that of the Buwayhids. The Buwayhids were a family of Daylamite origin who rose from leading bands of mercenaries to establishing a dynastic federation that ruled over the central Abbasid heartlands in Iraq and Iran. The three brothers ʿAlī b. Būya, al-Ḥasan b. Būya and Aḥmad b. Būya respectively conquered Fārs (320/932), Rayy (335/947) and Baghdad (335/946) in the first half of the fourth/tenth century, together establishing a triad of

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<sup>11</sup> This in turn has allowed the Imāmīya a remarkable continuity over the centuries in contrast to the Ismāʿīlī and Zaydī Shīʿa, whose continued need for a politically active Imamate has often provoked radical adaptations to the vicissitudes of history.

<sup>12</sup> The term was coined in Hodgson, vol. ii, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> The authoritative history of the Ḥamdānīds remains Canard. This work, however, give much discussion to religion, and the nature of the Ḥamdānīds' relationship with Shīʿism remains poorly understood. For a brief discussion thereof see Winter, pp. 19-20.

dynasties ruling over the three centres. Though the brothers were of a Shī'ī persuasion, Aḥmad b. Būya did not depose the Abbasid caliph following his conquest of Baghdad, electing instead to maintain him as a puppet, for whom the Buwayhids theoretically acted as governors, though in practice the caliph had no choice in the matter, was stripped of all political power and was confined to his palace.

Not only did the Buwayhids emasculate the caliphate, humbling the political aspirations of Sunnī Islam, but they also took active steps to enfranchise Shī'īs within their domains. Shī'īs courtiers could become viziers, Shī'ī scholars could become judges and in Baghdad in 353/964 the Buwayhid ruler of Baghdad Mu'izz al-Dawla sanctioned and encouraged the public celebration of Ghadīr, which commemorated the Prophet's designation of 'Alī as his successor at Ghadīr Khumm, and commemorations of al-Ḥusayn's death on the tenth day of Muḥarram. Never before had Shī'ism had so assertive a presence in the public space of the Abbasid capital. The Imāmīya in centres like Rayy and Baghdad found themselves transformed from a community subject to state-sponsored persecution to one that was able access to the highest levels of courtly and intellectual life, a circumstance which thrust upon them opportunities for exchange and necessities of polemical engagement with other traditions.<sup>14</sup> This development, meanwhile, overlaps precisely with the formation of an Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus along the lines of that being developed by the non-Shī'ī mainstream.

It is clear that the hundred years between 390/900 and 390/1000 saw the Imāmīya transformed, and that the production of *ḥadīth* compendia was integral to that transformation.<sup>15</sup> What is less clear by far is how this transformation of the Imāmīya happened, and what role their relationship with and development of their *ḥadīth* literature played in that. Compared with our picture of Sunnī *ḥadīth* literature at this time and the network of institutions, movements and ideas into which it fits, our information about the Imāmīya is woefully lacking. In terms of our view of Sunnī thought in this period we now have populous and vigorous field of substantial studies regarding the formation of institutional schools of law, the conceptualisation of the value of *ḥadīth* and the compilation and canonisation of *ḥadīth* compendia. We have a vivid (though by no means uncontested) picture of the intellectual context in which *ḥadīth* compendia like those of al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī were written read and consulted as sources of doctrine and law.<sup>16</sup> By way of contrast, the surviving collections

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<sup>14</sup> For the history of the Buwayhids, including the little that is known about the exact nature of their Shī'ī inclinations, see primarily Busse; Kennedy; Donohue. It is interesting to note that the two other main branches of Shī'ism, the Zaydīs and the Ismā'īlīs, who continued with doctrines of revolutionary politics centred around very present, very active imāms, did not develop a lasting interest in *ḥadīth*.

<sup>15</sup> See Madelung, 'Reception'.

<sup>16</sup> For the development of the Sunnī schools of law see above all Hallaq, *Origins*; Melchert, *Formation*; Makdisi. An excellent account of the development of Sunnī *ḥadīth* literature over this period is supplied by Brown.

of Shī'ī *ḥadīth* from the late-third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries are pricks of light in the dark. We have little or no knowledge regarding how these texts were compiled and how they were used.

Al-Ṣadūq is superbly placed to shed light on these shadowy formations of Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature. With a career spanning the second half of the fourth/tenth century, he represents the last point in this literature's development before, at the turn of the fifth/eleventh century, our picture becomes much clearer. In al-Ṣadūq's student al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) we encounter methodological literature of the kind produced by other groups and the apparent formation of institutional structures similar to those of the emerging schools of law.<sup>17</sup> Al-Ṣadūq is firmly situated in the intellectual traditions of the earlier part of the century before the advent of such familiar shapes, yet he represents an unique window onto these uncertainties, owing to the simple fact that he leaves us a quantity and diversity of writings that far exceeds any previous Imāmī author. No other Imāmī author before al-Ṣadūq leaves more than a single surviving work, with the exception of al-Nu'mānī, who leaves two. Al-Ṣadūq leaves us no fewer than eighteen (though this is a small fraction of perhaps two-hundred that he wrote).<sup>18</sup> This is far more than an expansion in volume (al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī* is, after all, very large), for this array of different works allows us to see al-Ṣadūq compiling *ḥadīth* in different ways for different objectives in different circumstances. However large it may be, *al-Kāfī*'s many volumes, its hundreds of chapters and thousands of *aḥādīth* are all compiled as part of the same operation, namely to create a reliable encyclopaedia of belief and practice. Al-Ṣadūq, too, writes works with a similar objective to instruct, but he also writes to entertain, to deceive, to persuade, and to negotiate. Law and theology share pages with stories about the Buddha, the chicken which supports the universe and the reason why the recently deceased appear to weep. For the first time we have an Imāmī author whom we can examine as the creator of an oeuvre, across which we can get a real sense of his authorial repertoire, of how an Imāmī scholar of this period approached the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus and how he used that corpus to address and to navigate his world.

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter I.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the reasons for this seemingly radical loss, see Ansari, '*Uṣūl*'. As well as the usual suspects of violence and persecution, Ansari also points out that many of these 'lost' works may well have been subsumed into those that survive. Similarly, we may owe the vanishing of almost all of ibn Bābawayh the Elder's works to al-Ṣadūq's subsequent prolific transmission of his father's traditions.

## THE LIFE OF AL-ŞADŪQ – *The Sources and Their Limits*

The following chapters will attempt to describe the nature of al-Şadūq's intellectual character with as much precision as is possible. As far as his biography is concerned, meanwhile, the paucity of sources means that the sum of what is known for certain about his life may be presented here. Despite al-Şadūq's extensive literary output, the biographical details therein are few and far between, and though more of his writings have become available over the past few decades there is little to add to the biography given by Fyzee in 1942.<sup>19</sup> We know that al-Şadūq was born into a scholarly family of Qummī origin, but that he settled in Rayy, where he died and was buried and where his tomb may still be visited in Ibn Bābūya Cemetery in what is now the unglamorous suburb of *Shahr-i Rayy* in south Tehran. He travelled widely in Khurāsān and also to Baghdad. Basic though it is, this outline is still an essential component to understanding al-Şadūq as a scholar, as is the nature of the sources from which these details are gleaned.

Our principle two sources of evidence remain the writings of al-Şadūq himself and near-contemporary prosopographical works. Later generations of Imāmī scholars, though not infrequently interested in al-Şadūq's intellectual contributions, add very little to the record of these earlier sources.<sup>20</sup> With this long-standing evidence we are able to construct a broad picture of al-Şadūq's associations – the people he met and the places he visited. We can list important teachers and students, as well as centres where al-Şadūq was active, thereby (at least partially) mapping his intellectual associations.

*Rijāl* literature, usually the primary resource for biography in Islamic intellectual history, little avails the would-be biographer of al-Şadūq. While in the works of al-Najāshī (d. 463/1071) and al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1066-7) we have Imāmī *rijāl* works from only two generations after al-Şadūq (both authors studied with students of al-Şadūq) – works to which we shall regular recourse in what follows – they are more bibliographies than prosopographies, and

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<sup>19</sup> Fyzee, pp. xxxii-xxxvi.

<sup>20</sup> To write a history of al-Şadūq's reception in Imāmī thought would require a study at least as long as the present one. Newman has contributed a part of that history, examining specifically how medical *aḥādīth* in al-Şadūq's writings were transmitted into the Safavid period. He observes that al-Şadūq's writings seem to have decreased in popularity after the Buwayhid period until the Safavid period when interest was rekindled (See Newman, *Recovery*). It may be observed in this light that it is the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī conflict that began in Safavid times that still deeply effects how al-Şadūq's standing as a scholar is perceived in the modern seminary. Thus we see in contemporary mujtahids' evaluation of his works an enduring concern to rebut the Akhbārī assertion of the total authenticity of the 'Four Books.' See e.g. al-Khū'ī, vol. i, p. 26.

their substantial record of al-Ṣadūq's works are accompanied by only the scarcest supplementary details about his life. Al-Ṭūsī offers little more than praise of his scholarly acumen<sup>21</sup> (though as we shall see in Chapter I, these early prosopographers' favourable view of al-Ṣadūq is not without significance). Al-Najāshī gives a little more, informing us that al-Ṣadūq originated in Qum but subsequently settled in Rayy, that he considers him to have been the leader (literally *wajh*; 'face') of the Imāmīya in Khurāsān. He also states that al-Ṣadūq visited Baghdad as a young man in 355/966, where he taught prominent Imāmī scholars.<sup>22</sup> This already amounts to nearly all the 'purely' biographical details we have. A final, oft-noted detail that originates in a statement in one of his books is that al-Ṣadūq was in fact born as a result of a prayer from the Hidden Imām.<sup>23</sup> We shall discuss this at length in Chapter IV.

It is primarily from al-Ṣadūq's own works that further details may be sought. An invaluable resource is his *asānīd*. Al-Najāshī and al-Ṭūsī both provide the sources from whom they learned al-Ṣadūq's works, but from al-Ṣadūq's *asānīd* and from those of his contemporaries we can, as with any *ḥadīth* compiler, compile a list of those from whom he has transmitted and who transmit from him, and thus create a substantial map of scholarly relationships. Such lists that have been exhaustively constructed by Shī'ī scholars, with al-Khū'ī and Ṭīhrānī's magisterial encyclopaedias providing essential reference points.<sup>24</sup> *Asānīd* can also attest to the strength of relationships: al-Ṣadūq's father ibn Bābawayh the Elder for instance, is a perennial presence in his son's *asānīd*, suggesting a formative intellectual influence, born out by what can be seen of comparisons between their works. Such information is vital for assessing al-Ṣadūq's intellectual associations, as well as his reception among the next generation. More often than not, however, this utility is hampered by the fact that many of al-Ṣadūq's most oft-cited teachers, among them Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd, Muḥammad b. 'Alī Mājīlawayh and Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. al-Mutawakkil, themselves leave no extant works whereby to examine the substance of their influence on al-Ṣadūq.

Though *asānīd* are a rich resource, and it must be noted that those of the early Shī'ī *ḥadīth* tradition have yet to receive anything approaching the monumental systematic attention that figures like Juynboll have applied to the Sunnī *ḥadīth* corpus,<sup>25</sup> theirs can be only a partial picture. They only attest to interactions in which *ḥadīth* were narrated, and even in the case of

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<sup>21</sup> Al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, p. 442.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Najāshī, p. 372.

<sup>23</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 529.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Khū'ī, vol. xvii, p. 339; Ṭīhrānī, *Tabaqāt*, vol. i, pp. 287-288.

<sup>25</sup> Newman (*Formative Period*) and Haider (*Origins*) in particular have made efforts in this direction with careful analyses of select samples of Imāmī *asānīd*. It remains to be seen whether, in the face of a changing field of *ḥadīth* studies, the will remains in the academy to produce for Shī'ī *ḥadīth* the kind aspired to by Juynboll for Sunnī *ḥadīth*.



so staunch a traditionalist as al-Ṣadūq this does not account for all points of intellectual contact. This will be substantially illustrated in Chapter II's exploration of al-Ṣadūq's relationship with *adab* literature, an area where the *isnād* is much less dominant than in traditionalist law and theology, but in other chapters, too we will frequently see myriad influences acting on al-Ṣadūq's work beyond those of his teachers in *ḥadīth*.

A vital complement to the information of *asānīd* is the information we have on al-Ṣadūq's geographical movements. The few details given by al-Najāshī already offer promising avenues of investigation: a scholar of Qummī origin, based in Rayy with strong links to the community in Khurāsān as well as contacts in Baghdad. The conversation during the century before al-Ṣadūq between a more traditionalist Imāmī community in Qum and more rationalist-leaning Imāmīs in Baghdad, including specifically the reflection of these tensions in *ḥadīth* literature has been examined by Newman (2000), and certainly we will see echoes thereof in al-Ṣadūq's challenging of those who would subject the imāms' *aḥādīth* to theological scrutiny. In al-Ṣadūq's works we find accounts of his journeys to other locations such as Tūs and Nishāpūr, including some instances wherein he mentions meeting and discoursing with other scholars in these places. A more substantial account of these journeys, of whom he met and where and what they exchanged, would doubtless increase our understanding of al-Ṣadūq, of his contemporary Imāmīs and of scholarly networks of the period more generally. The nature of these scattered, laconic references, however, does not readily lend itself to such an account.

Though on his travels al-Ṣadūq often eludes us, the city with which he is most associated, Rayy, where he lived, died and was buried, provides an invaluable piece of context. We find al-Ṣadūq contending with the Mu'tazilī ideas that so dominated the court of Rayy, we find him addressing and even challenging the city's potentates and we find him engaging its literary culture. His relationship to other Shī'īs, too, reflects the Rāzī backdrop: he is largely untroubled by Ismā'īlīs, whose *da'wa* had encountered major setbacks in the region by the time al-Ṣadūq was active, while Mu'tazilī-leaning Zaydīs are much more of a vexation.<sup>26</sup>

A crucially absent piece of information for this study is any chronology for al-Ṣadūq's works. Naturally, it would have been illuminating to be able to examine what developments or changes in his thinking emerge or are reflected in writings from different periods of his life. Unfortunately, the information is simply not available to construct even a rudimentary

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<sup>26</sup> A glimpse of a more personal aspect to al-Ṣadūq's location amongst the Shī'a of the east is his particular reverence for the eighth imām 'Alī al-Riḍā and his shrine in Tūs. While other surviving Imāmī discussions of pilgrimage to the shrines of the imāms from the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh invariably place the most emphasis on visitation to al-Ḥusayn's shrine in Karbalā, al-Ṣadūq in *al-Faqīh*'s chapters on these rites allots the longest discussion to the virtues of visting al-Riḍā, 'the stranger,' at his tomb in Tūs. See *al-Faqīh*, vol. ii, pp. 379-383.

chronological framework. Several of his books refer to dated events, before which they naturally cannot have been written, but in no case can we definitively mark a work as being wholly subsequent to another. It is true that in many of his books al-Ṣadūq cites his other writings, which might be taken as an indication that the cited work is older. However, we also find cases where two of his works cite one another.<sup>27</sup> There could be many explanations for these mutual citations, such as later editing of previous works or the writing of more than one work simultaneously, entirely normal in al-Ṣadūq's context. Nonetheless, whatever the reason it renders such citations insufficiently reliable as a stand-alone source for establishing the order in which his works were composed.

There are many instances where this lack of a chronology is particularly frustrating. As we will see, al-Ṣadūq produced works of many very different kinds, and to know their sequence – for instance, whether he at some points in time moved substantially from one sort of writing to another – would certainly allow for a more developed picture of his thought. At times more specific historical details are a keenly-felt loss: *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* is dedicated to the same al-Ṣāhib b. ʿAbbād whom al-Tawḥīdī tells us banished al-Ṣadūq from Rayy out of dislike for his intellectual positions. Knowing which of these two important interactions came first might substantially colour how we approach the text of *ʿUyūn* – was it a plea for reconciliation or the very cause of the vizier's ire?

Most importantly, a chronology of al-Ṣadūq's writings might assist us in determining and locating any significant ideological changes of heart that he may have undergone over his career. It must be asserted in this regard that the following examination of al-Ṣadūq's oeuvre finds not a single substantial instance of two of al-Ṣadūq's works being in substantial, inescapable doctrinal conflict, such that we could confidently conclude that at some point between he changed his mind. Perhaps, with the added assistance of a reliable sequence of al-Ṣadūq's works, we might better have been able to spot shifts in his views that for now remain hidden.<sup>28</sup>

Such is the available biographical context for our author. Given the scale and complexity of his works it is certainly a frustration that we do not have a richer personal history to which to relate them. On the other hand, it is not least due to the particular character of these works,

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<sup>27</sup> See for instance *ʿIlal*, p. 34; *ʿUyūn*, vol. ii, pp. 92-93.

<sup>28</sup> One such instance that has more than once been hypothesised is a perceived conflict between al-Ṣadūq's *al-Iʿtiqādāt* and his *al-Tawḥīd*, based on readings of the latter as conceding to Muʿtazilī doctrines that the former opposes, a hypothesis that has been used in turn to assert that *al-Tawḥīd* represents a later acquiescence. As shall be explored at length in Chapter III, however, such a reading of *al-Tawḥīd* and therefore the chronology that emerges from it do not stand up to close scrutiny of the work.

largely bereft as they are of lengthy discussions from the author regarding his activities and circumstances, that our knowledge about al-Ṣadūq's life is so laconic. It is to this character of his works that we shall now turn.

## COMPILATIONS AND COMPILATION CRITICISM

Al-Ṣadūq was a compiler of *aḥādīth*. While his surviving works are many, they offer us little in the way of theoretical discussions, systematic explanation of theology and epistemology or careful delineations of the Imāmīya from other schools. Instead they present us with thousands of collected *aḥādīth*. Al-Ṣadūq's voice appears commenting upon these *aḥādīth*, explaining, summarising and introducing them, but such appearances are tiny islands in an ocean of transmitted material.

To many eyes this limits al-Ṣadūq's utility as a resource for the study of his own context. While his amassed words of the Prophet and the imāms are a potential treasure-trove for exploring the mostly second/eighth-century world whence they purport to originate, they are not widely held to offer much information on their compiler, beyond their illustration that he was indeed a traditionist who preferred to deal with texts rather than discursive argument. Those analyses that have been made of al-Ṣadūq's thought have fluctuated between basing themselves only on those texts where he does speak *in propria persona* and the problematic assumption that whatever is said in the *aḥādīth* he collects may be taken as a verbatim statement of his own view. The results have been an assessment of al-Ṣadūq's works and of his character as a scholar that is largely both self-evidently confused and confined to a small fraction of his extant oeuvre (see Chapter I).

Al-Ṣadūq's fate is largely symptomatic of the broader state of the study of *ḥadīth* and other areas of premodern Arabic literature during the last century and beyond. From Goldziher's first, epochal work on the subject,<sup>29</sup> scholars of *ḥadīth* in the Western academy have in their readings of *ḥadīth* compendia overwhelmingly focussed on the origin of what has been compiled, the *aḥādīth* themselves, rather than treating the compilation, the labours of the compiler, as deserving of interest. More broadly, it has long been assumed that the medium of compilation, immensely widespread across diverse literatures in Arabic and other languages, is not worth significant consideration as a vehicle of expression. A Western model of literature that elates the sustained narrative of the epic, the tragedy and the novel and which celebrates

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<sup>29</sup> It must be remarked that Goldziher did, on occasion, remark on the nature of compilations as distinct from the question of their contents' authenticity. See Fadel, p. 163.

authorial claims to total originality has little time for the compiler's fragmented, disemplotted relaying of others' words. This thesis, conversely, will take compilation seriously as a potent medium of authorial self-expression. While al-Ṣadūq's collected *aḥādīth* may well be valuable evidence for their supposed origins, as material compiled by al-Ṣadūq they are at the very least just as valuable as evidence for his own interactions with his intellectual context. The fact that al-Ṣadūq's works are overwhelmingly made up of words that he transmits rather than words he has composed, of collected discrete components rather than a continuous address renders these works no less capable of conveying complex ideas and arguments and of pursuing nuanced authorial agenda.

In such aims it is hoped that this thesis will build upon a of the other studies that have sought both to contend the unacknowledged richness of compilation literatures and whose number has been steadily increasing over the past two decades. Notable works in this respect include Montgomery's study of al-Jāhīz's *al-Ḥayawān*, Kilpatrick's study of al-Iṣfahānī's *al-Aghānī* and Davis' study of Firdowsī's *Shāh nāmāh*.<sup>30</sup> In all three the authors seek to radically expand the horizons of meaning offered by these texts, rehabilitating the figure of the compiler from that of a faceless tradent to that of a writer who channels a distinctive authorial potency. The situation is well-expressed in the words of Hilary Kilpatrick (who is speaking specifically with regard to *adab* compilations but could be discussing a far broader group of texts): 'the designation "compilation" is no more, and no less, useful in the context of Arabic *adab* literature than the term 'novel' is in the context of modern literatures.'<sup>31</sup>

The study of *ḥadīth*, meanwhile, has proved fertile ground for this increasing interest in compilation. In Kevin Reinhart's manifesto for the state of the field, 'Juynbolliana, Gradualism, the Big Bang and Ḥadīth Study in the Twenty-First Century', the author exhorts just such a shift away from atomising questions of origins towards a greater attention to compilation. Addressing and echoing a number of other recent works, Reinhart advocates a shift from questions of authenticity to those of authority: what kind of authority do Muslims accord to *ḥadīth*? How do they construct that authority? How is that authority deployed in practice? To draw attention to such questions, moreover, is to draw attention to the variety of answer they may receive across the history the Muslim world – rather than being governed by a single trajectory of canonisation, whereby it attains scriptural status in the late third/ninth century that it then retains uniformly for ever more, Reinhart highlights studies that have

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<sup>30</sup> See Montgomery, Kilpatrick, 'Context'; *Making the Great Book of Songs*; Davis. Though the *Shāh nāmāh* is not a compilation as such, rather its myriad stories and episodes are synthesised into a single epic narrative, Davis' lament over scholarship's tendency to assume that Firdowsī collects and transmits these narratives uncritically, contending instead that Firdowsī brings the tales of Persia's kings together into an intensely structured exactly mirrors the sentiments expressed here regarding *ḥadīth* compendia.

<sup>31</sup> Kilpatrick, 'Abbāsīd', p. 78.

shown the changing understandings and uses of *ḥadīth* in different contexts.<sup>33</sup> These questions will all be central to our discussions of al-Ṣadūq, observing how he labours to construct the words of the imāms as a viable authority for his very particular epistemological circumstances.

These questions in turn place questions of compilation centre stage. If we see *ḥadīth*'s authority not as the inevitable consequence of their prophetic source but as constructed by Muslim scholars, our attention must be drawn to the mechanics of how those scholars present *aḥādīth* to be read, examined and/or obeyed. A number of recent studies have subjected these processes to examination in various contexts. Taking a diverse range of *ḥadīth* compendia as their subject matter, Burge, Fadel, Newman, Pouzet, Tokatly, Mourad and Lindsay, all demonstrate the extent to which how an individual *ḥadīth* is compiled can dramatically shape the message it conveys.

Fadel and Tokatly have both approached the question of compilation through its study by premodern Muslim writers, specifically with regard to the *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī. Al-Bukhārī's compilation's unparalleled status has attracted numerous commentaries, and amongst these several specifically examine the structure of the work.<sup>34</sup> Focussing on the work of ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī's *Hady al-sārī*, Fadel affirms the significance of such commentators as historians of ideas,<sup>35</sup> not least for their illustration of the dramatic extent to which the context in which a *ḥadīth* is compiled can dramatically affect its content.<sup>36</sup> Tokatly, meanwhile, focusses on the commentator, in this case al-Khaṭṭābī, exploring how his selection and presentation of the material from al-Bukhārī's work that he chooses to comment on reveals the polemical intentions behind his commentary.

Also working on *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, Burge has pursued a more ambitious approach, seeking to take analysis of the work's structures to a level beyond that achieved by the commentators of earlier centuries. He examines detail the individual structures of sections ('books,' sg. *kitāb*) of the work to illustrate how the precise ordering of chapters and their contents are engineered to suit al-Bukhārī's objectives, such that his examination of those structures may shed light upon those objectives.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Reinhart, pp. 430-436 and *passim*. Studies to which Reinhart draws attention in this regard that are of particular relevance to al-Ṣadūq are Brown's exploration of the establishment of al-Bukhārī and Muslim's collections as canonical over the fourth/tenth century and Musa's exploration of the mostly third/ninth-century debates regarding the status of the *ḥadīth* corpus as a whole.

<sup>34</sup> Tokatly, pp. 56-57.

<sup>35</sup> Fadel, p. 162.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165-167.

<sup>37</sup> Burge, 'Reading Between the Lines', pp. 177-195 and *passim*.

Quite different from al-Bukhārī's voluminous compendium, a genre within *ḥadīth* literature that has received attention is that of the 'forty *ḥadīth*'. In two very early examples of the study of compilation that unfortunately did not inspire emulation, both Pouzet and Bishop explored the most famous example of this genre, the *Arba'ūn ḥadīth* of al-Nawawī. Pouzet takes advantage of the *arba'ūn* form's relative brevity to subject al-Nawawī's compilation to thoroughgoing analysis from beginning to end, exploring how in content and structure it is tailored to best achieve al-Nawawī's goal of instructing lay believers in the fundamentals of the faith. A valuable contribution is Pouzet's study of how al-Nawawī's book sits within a genre of other compilations of forty *ḥadīth*.<sup>38</sup> Bishop's earlier study, though brief and largely interested in comparison with the Gospels, also observes of how al-Nawawī's selection of material reflects his didactic priorities.<sup>39</sup> That he sees no ordering of material in al-Nawawī's book may be contested, but his impulse to look for it and his suggestion that form-critical methods be applied more widely to *ḥadīth* literature<sup>40</sup> is worthy of recognition.

More recently, Mourad and Lindsay have subjected to productive examination another collection of forty, that of ibn 'Asākir. This collection is devoted to exhorting the faithful to *jihad*, its compiler being an enthusiastic recipient of the patronage of Nur al-Dīn Zangī. Like Pouzet, this study studies this short compilation as a whole, exploring how ibn 'Asākir imbued his message into the selection and ordering of *aḥādīth*, as well as his *asānīd*.<sup>41</sup> This study is of especial interest to us for their exploration of how ibn 'Asākir exploits the particular strengths and possibilities of the *ḥadīth* compendium. His task was to provide a manifesto authorising the diverse campaigns of his patron, a task to which a conventional *fiqhī* discussion of *jihad*, containing as was bound to do all the exacting conditions, caveats and prohibitions concerning when the faithful should march to war. By contrast, he may with good faith present without commentary forty *aḥādīth* that contain no such inhibiting detail.<sup>42</sup> This same utility of compiled *ḥadīth* as a medium was also explored by Hodgson in his analysis of how al-Ṭabarī reports the killing of 'Uthmān. Faced with so divisive an event, Hodgson shows how al-Ṭabarī lays a breadcrumb trail of engaging narratives that toe the line of Jamā'ī orthodoxy, he meanwhile subverts this through a mixture of carefully chosen *asānīd* and arrangement of reports to point the discerning reader away from these platitudes towards a more developed legal consideration of the problem. Al-Ṭabarī's capacity to juxtapose different reports without being compelled to deliver a single, synthesised account thus allows him to enact a subtle

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<sup>38</sup> See also Burge, 'Myth', p. 224 for a brief discussion of the genre.

<sup>39</sup> Bishop, pp. 255, 259-260.

<sup>40</sup> Bishop, pp. 260, 261.

<sup>41</sup> Mourad and Lindsay, pp. 63-81.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-58, 70.

discussion of power and legitimacy while also seeming to hostile eyes to uphold the accepted narrative.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps the most immediately significant recent study of compilation for our purposes is the work of Andrew Newman, who in his *The Formation of Twelver Shī'ism* develops the idea of 'ḥadīth as discourse.' Along similar lines to the other authors discussed, Newman's work is distinguished by its focus on al-Ṣadūq's immediate Imāmī predecessors. Discussing early Imāmī compendia from al-Barqī to al-Kulaynī (thus ending the study around the time of al-Ṣadūq's birth) Newman explores how in particular the theological content of these compendia, that is to say how the compilers select and arrange *aḥādīth* with theological content, can be demonstrated to be in response to the changing circumstances faced by each author and by the Imāmī community. Newman explores both how these changes reflect responses to theological currents (al-Kulaynī, for instance, responding to the more rationalist environment of Baghdad by excluding and dispersing traditions containing doctrines deemed suspect), and also how compendia may reflect the broader experiences of the Imāmī community, with accounts of imāms with extraordinary abilities proliferating in context of a Shī'a still struggling in the aftermath of the occultation.

All of the above studies provide an essential grounding on which our study of al-Ṣadūq aims to build. Beyond all else, they allow us to begin with the assertion that not only is the assumption of compilers' lack of authorial agency in their works theoretically untenable, but that it is demonstrably false. Not all of the avenues they explore are readily possible for al-Ṣadūq: his works, for instance, are hard to place in meaningful categories of genre, and Mourad and Lindsay are able to pursue rich avenues both of manuscript history and authorial biography that a study of al-Ṣadūq cannot hope to emulate. Nonetheless, beyond all else these scholars together show in diverse contexts the importance of paying due scrutiny to how compilers present their material in understanding *ḥadīth* collections and their significance.

It is in Burge's work that the theoretical underpinnings and implications of such an approach to *ḥadīth* compendia has been most thoroughly developed. As well as productively applying close attention to compilation to a number of quite different *ḥadīth* collections, Burge outlines the bases for of a methodology of 'compilation criticism.' He draws on the literary theory of Eco, Greimas and especially Frye to provide foundations for an examination of how compilations produce meaning from their constituent parts, exploring the dynamics of semiosis at work when a compiler adduces a given *ḥadīth* in a given context. Burge's study extrapolates a framework from Frye's readings of the biblical text, drawing analogy between

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<sup>43</sup> Hodgson, vol. i, pp. 353-358.

the latter's exploration of how words generate meaning and how *ḥadīth* do so. Frye models a word's meaning as a conversation between an individual usage, its use across the larger work in which that usage occurs, its dictionary definition and its meaning in others' usage thereof. Burge explores how the *ḥadīth* in the compilation may be conceived as operating along the same quadripartite lines – possessing meaning in terms of its individual usage and its usage elsewhere in the same compilation, as well as in terms of how it is used by other compilers and, for some *ḥadīth*, also a 'dictionary meaning,' a long-standing, conventional understanding of a *ḥadīth* and what it is about. Thus conceived, compilation becomes an active process of adaptation and reappropriation, setting *aḥādīth* in conversation with the pre-existing range of ways they have been compiled and read, prompting them to speak in ways that are slightly or even radically different.<sup>44</sup>

Burge also points to two critical methods current in Biblical scholarship, canonical criticism and selection criticism, as particularly valuable starting points for the study of the compilation of *ḥadīth*. While stressing that one can never simply transplant a methodology wholesale from one field to another,<sup>45</sup> Burge points to the efficacy of certain questions that each of these critical methods ask, as well as their shared disinterest in the ultimate provenance of the text under discussion. Redaction criticism instead interrogates the reasons why a given compiler selects the texts she does from amongst those available. Canonical criticism, meanwhile, examines how the texts in a given collection are presented – what order they are placed in, how they are grouped and so on.<sup>46</sup>

Canonical criticism, in its interrogation of how compendia are structured, comprises a host of questions that will accompany our readings of al-Ṣadūq that we shall set out below. Burge has demonstrated the efficacy of this approach in studies of sections from al-Bukhārī's *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* and the *tafsīr* of al-ʿAyyāshī, but he also notes that it would be best applied to compilations that can be observed as a whole.<sup>47</sup> This is exactly what we shall undertake in the chapter-long studies of whole compilations that make up Section II of this thesis.

As for redaction criticism, as Burge observes, this method is not always easy for *ḥadīth* compilations, for we do not always have a clear picture of the corpus from which a compiler was selecting at our disposal.<sup>48</sup> Where he finds it productive is in his examination of al-Suyūṭī, for whom he has the resource of that prolific author's other works with which any single work may be compared, determining what materials were excluded or included for different

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<sup>44</sup> Burge, 'Myth', pp. 215-221 and passim.

<sup>45</sup> Burge, 'Reading Between the Lines', p. 176.

<sup>46</sup> Burge, 'Reading Between the Lines', pp. 171-177; *Myth*, p. 215.

<sup>47</sup> Burge, 'Reading Between the Lines', p. 174.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171-173.



projects.<sup>49</sup> Such is the case with our chosen compiler, and the different corpora that al-Ṣadūq deploys in different compilations will frequently have much to tell us about his authorial choices.

Redaction criticism also invites us to consider the more difficult but highly relevant task of identifying the broader *ḥadīth* corpus in circulation amongst the Imāmī scholarly community and beyond from which al-Ṣadūq drew his material, of which we can only have a very partial picture. Sometimes we are able to compare how a group of scholars respond to a common corpus. In Chapter IV, for example, we will look at a highly controversial set of *aḥādīth* – those pertaining to visions of the Hidden Imām – and see how different compilers including al-Ṣadūq deal with them, but such opportunities are relatively rare. If, for instance, we consider al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī*, we have a vast corpus of *aḥādīth*, many of which al-Ṣadūq does not narrate but which were certainly in circulation when he was writing. Why is this the case? Al-Kulaynī is only a very sporadic presence in al-Ṣadūq’s *asānīd*, but there are substantial overlaps in the two writers’ intellectual associations.<sup>50</sup> When, therefore, we see al-Ṣadūq apparently neglecting of a given text or group of texts in al-Kulaynī, the reason for this could be one of several, including al-Ṣadūq’s ignorance of the text, his considered objection to its contents and/or *isnād* or his hostility to its immediate source. Considerations such as these mean that the questions involved in redaction criticism may not always be possible to answer. What is important, regardless, is to acknowledge their pertinence as questions in our goal of understanding why al-Ṣadūq’s compilations look the way they do.

The expanding literature on *ḥadīth* compilation surveyed here allow us now to set out some guiding criteria, building particularly on Burge’s work to construct a skeleton methodology for compilation criticism. Below, then, are six guiding questions that will underlie our examination of al-Ṣadūq’s texts, and which, it is hoped, will contribute to subsequent studies of *ḥadīth* compendia.

1. Our first question when approaching al-Ṣadūq’s *ḥadīth* compendia is that of the compendia’s purpose. What is it for? What does al-Ṣadūq wish to convey to his reader? As we shall see, answers to this question can vary considerably, as, correspondingly, does the construction of his several works. An effective measure for this interrogation is to draw attention to anomalies, that is to say features of a compilation that challenge an otherwise tempting view of its intention (including the

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<sup>49</sup> Burge, ‘Jalāl al-Dīn’, pp. 280ff.

<sup>50</sup> This set of relationships shall be explored in depth in Chapter I.

all-too-prevalent view of all compilations as straightforward encyclopaedias).<sup>51</sup> If al-Ṣadūq wishes to denounce the credibility of a particular narrator, why does he juxtapose these with reports from that same narrator that he apparently asks the reader to believe? If al-Ṣadūq is intent on demonstrating the compliance of Imāmī *aḥādīth* with Mu‘tazilī theology, why does he include material that appears both to contradict that theology and indeed to assault the very exercise of theological reasoning? If al-Ṣadūq wishes us to ridicule Sunnī apocryphal traditions, why does he select examples of those traditions that seem to offer proof of his dearly-held doctrine of the occultation?

2. An important consequence of the first question that also complicates it somewhat is its alerting us to the capacity of the compiler to deliberately mislead the reader. We must, therefore, constantly be asking whether a compiler is telling us the whole truth. It is no rarity for authors to operate something less than full disclosure of their intentions, and compilers, as authors, are unsurprisingly no exception to this rule. Burge, Tokatly and Hodgson have all observed as much in the compilations they have studied, such misdirections constituting a valuable component of how the compiler delivers his message.<sup>52</sup> This returns us to the value of anomalies. Just as we should be on the lookout for aspects of compilations that conflict with what we may have presumed is what they intend to tell the reader and how, we should be open to indications that the stated purpose of a compiler’s presentation of material may not be entirely true.
3. Reinhart announces the shift from authenticity to authority, and when examining a *ḥadīth* compendium we must ask how the compiler is constructing and using the potentially prodigious authority of his collected texts. Brown, Musa, Mourad and Lindsay and others draw attention to the utter heterogeneity of *ḥadīth*’s scriptural (or not) status in different contexts. As we shall come to see, al-Ṣadūq’s endeavour to condition his readers’ response to the words of the imāms in the aftermath of the vanishing of the imām who speaks them is a pervasive concern across his works, but also one which he pursues in a wide variety of ways.
4. The compilation critic must forever be asking how the different components of a compilation affect one another. She holds that how a reader reads and responds to a

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<sup>51</sup> Such an approach is regularly of use to scholars examining *ḥadīth* compendia. See Burge, ‘Reading Between the Lines’, p. 187; ‘Jalāl al-Dīn’, p. 285; Fadel, pp. 163-164. It is also integral to the approach of premodern Muslim commentators al-Bukhārī’s structure. If, for instance, al-Bukhārī wishes to inform us about the subject outlined in his chapter title, why does he include material that seems to have little to do therewith, or indeed exclude material that would seem to have been pertinent? See Tokatly, pp. 55-57.

<sup>52</sup> Tokatly, pp. 60, 87, Burge, ‘Jalāl al-Dīn’, p. 299, Hodgson, vol. i, pp. 353-358.

given *ḥadīth* will be conditioned by that *ḥadīth*'s particular setting in a compilation. It may be conditioned by other *ḥadīth* the reader has also encountered in that compilation that seem to contradict it. It may be conditioned by the rubric under which it is collected – when reading a chapter purporting to discuss the question of predestination, a reader will be focussed on how the texts therein shed light on that question, and may be correspondingly less focussed on other information they may contain. The same *ḥadīth* may be used in the very different context of a narration of the imām's life – there the reader's focus may be less on the doctrinal content of the imām's teachings and more on the circumstances in which those teachings are delivered. The first three questions concern what a compiler is trying to do. This question lies at the heart of how we may discover this.

5. An underlying conviction that must sustain compilation criticism is that of the sophistication of this medium and of its authors that is to say the compilers. The studies here cited have already demonstrated the considerable intricacy with which compilers' mould their material, and none gives any indication (most of these studies being of article-length) that they consider the measure of that intricacy to be exhausted in their observations. This is not a question of imposition, of assuming the presence of elaborate systems where there may be none. Rather it is a question of undoing the anomalous presumption that such sophistication is absent. Compilers are authors – we must assume that they seek to influence and anticipate how their texts will influence their readers just as we assume of other kinds of author.

A useful concept in this regard is Ricoeur's notion of the hermeneutic wager.<sup>53</sup> Posited in the context of creating a hermeneutics of symbols, Ricoeur's 'wager' is the necessary gamble of assuming that a set of symbols have an internal logic such that they may be interpreted systematically. Only by such an assumption may we begin to decode them, and in turn our assumption may (or may not) then be vindicated by the meaning that we are then able to produce. Compiled *aḥādīth* seem a good deal less abstract than the worlds of signification for which Ricoeur invents this concept, but they face the same hurdle of Ricoeur's symbols in that the structures of meaning that govern them are not self-evident to the outside observer. The compiler does not tell us that we can only understand a given *ḥadīth* properly by first reading those that precede it in careful sequence. If, however, we wager that this might be his intent, and then explore how our perception of a compiled *ḥadīth* changes when read in its compiled context, we may find that the effect is substantial, possibly to the point

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<sup>53</sup> Ricoeur, p. 355.

where the accidental engineering of these effects by the compiler becomes very unlikely.

Nonetheless, this opening wager compels us to enquire on a technical level to what extent this sophistication reaches. This especially concerns the previous question. As we ask how different components of a compilation affect one another, we must ask how far the constructed resonances between them may reach. How ambitious were compilers like al-Ṣadūq with regard to how much one part of their work might influence the reading of another? That a *ḥadīth*'s reading should be affected by other *aḥādīth* in the same chapter, and indeed the heading of that chapter seems a reasonable expectation. Similarly, we may extend this to the title of the compilation as a whole, though this might be rather more faint a resonance. What about the sometimes detailed statements of intention with which compilers open their works? These often carry the potential to dramatically affect how we read the *aḥādīth* within, but did compilers always expect their readers to remain mindful of their introductory sentiments (sometimes virtually the only direct instance of their authorial voice) hundreds of pages and many hundreds of *ḥadīth* later?

Burge has engaged this question to some extent in his readings of al-Bukhārī, identifying indications both that al-Bukhārī intends the reader to start with the first chapter and that more generally he intends his chapters to be read in sequence.<sup>54</sup> If a given chapter significantly affects how subsequent chapters will be read, the author must rely on the reader to read in the right direction. This same question of linearity of reading will concern us especially in chapters III and IV.

6. A last pertinent question is one of categories: to what extent are the *ḥadīth* compilations studied here to be regarded as literature? Though the literary possibilities of compilation have been explored in the work of Kilpatrick, Montgomery and others in their study of undisputed artists like al-Jāḥiẓ, *ḥadīth* compiled as such are seldom considered as literary. As we explore the extent of these compilations' subtlety and nuance, is their exclusion from this category justified? Of the studies of the art of compilation discussed above only Burge asserts that what he is doing amounts to treating these compilations as literature. This he qualifies to mean that they are discursive such that they can be elucidated by literary criticism.<sup>55</sup> Certainly this question could be interrogated at greater length, indeed a far greater length than the present study, and the answer would hinge not least on the troubled applicability to

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<sup>54</sup> Burge, 'Reading Between the Lines', pp. 187, 190. See also Burge, 'Jalāl al-Dīn', pp. 295-296.

<sup>55</sup> Burge, 'Myth', pp. 215, 226. In an earlier article, meanwhile, he states that though these compilations may be productively subjected to literary readings, they are nonetheless 'not literary in the full sense.' Burge, 'Reading Between the Lines', p. 196.

Western notions of the literary to premodern Arabic contexts in general.<sup>56</sup> We shall therefore not be visiting this question with same frequency of the previous five, rather our purpose in naming it here is to affirm that the extent to which al-Ṣadūq's works are literary will be kept open as we set out to read them.

## THE AIMS OF THIS THESIS

This thesis aims to study al-Ṣadūq as a thinker and as a compiler. It will ask the above questions of al-Ṣadūq's many surviving *ḥadīth* compendia to explore how he negotiates the transformative challenges facing the Imāmīya at the dawn of the Buwayhid period. In so doing we will discover the importance of this scholar as a witness to the formation of Imāmī ideas and the nature of the unique Imāmī vision of traditionism that was ultimately replaced by rapprochements with more conventional models of jurisprudence and theology. We will discover, too, the breadth of al-Ṣadūq's skill as a compiler, and as we do so it is hoped that this study will suggest new possibilities for the study of compilers and compilation. As we shall see, these objectives merge in the fact of compilation itself's centrality to al-Ṣadūq's epistemological vision.

This study aspires to be representative rather than comprehensive. There must be two reasons for this. The first is that while al-Ṣadūq's extant oeuvre is prodigious, it remains dwarfed by what bibliographers tell us once existed. While, for instance, we may assume that his extant legal works have much in common than those that are no longer available, for his works on subjects like history and Qur'ānic exegesis we have no surviving fragments from which we might be able to extrapolate an image of a whole. His works of history might have given us examples of the kind of sustained narrativity that is overwhelmingly absent from his surviving writings, while in his approach to the Qur'ān we might have found much to compliment our study of his approach to *aḥādīth*. Such opportunities remain lost to us, and to recognise this is to recognise that however colourful a portrait of al-Ṣadūq's intellectual life we may be able to create it will inevitably be a partial one.

The second reason is the more modest hurdle of space. The thousands of pages with which al-Ṣadūq's eighteen surviving books confront us are far broader an object than can be given universal coverage within the confines of a PhD thesis. As the survey of his works supplied below will illustrate in more detail, several of al-Ṣadūq's surviving writings receive little to

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<sup>56</sup> For a valuable overview of these problems see Micheal Allen.

no discussion in what follows, while among those volumes to which considerable space is allotted here there are some that could quite easily provide ample material for an entire thesis if not several.

Nonetheless, these constraints of space and ravages of time need not scupper our aspiration to offer a representative study of al-Ṣadūq. While there are many facets of his thought and career that could be studied – his theology; his politics; even his biography – it is, as has been declared, his compilation of the imāms' *aḥādīth* and his understanding of that task that concerns us here, and, as we shall demonstrate, constitutes the very foundation of his thought. We will see in what follows a prodigious variety in al-Ṣadūq's writing, and we must be resigned to the fact that there was once more to be seen, but there is also continuity; a core of shared concerns that unite the different texts studied here and point to a project grander than any one book or even the eighteen we have extant.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis consists of four chapters divided into two sections, each containing two chapters. The first of these sections is entitled 'Placing al-Ṣadūq' and the second 'Reading al-Ṣadūq.'

### 1. *Placing al-Ṣadūq*

In this first section we will analyse al-Ṣadūq's position in his tumultuous context. As alluded to already, this context encompasses two principal spheres: that of Imāmī legal-theological thought and that of *adab* literature. Chapter I, *Ghayba*, will examine the former, while the latter will be examined in Chapter II, '*Taqīya*.' In both chapters our task will be to establish how al-Ṣadūq's writings may be situated in relation to those of his contemporaries, and in both we will need to examine a great many of al-Ṣadūq's writings. In Chapter I we will trawl al-Ṣadūq's writings for indications of his position regarding the epistemological status of *ḥadīth* in relation to other proofs such as human reason and his methodology of selecting and critiquing *aḥādīth*, questions to which he never accords sustained, systematic treatment. In Chapter II we will examine how a great many of al-Ṣadūq's works diverge radically from the conventions of form and content governing the legal-theological manuals, creeds and catechisms that were already taking form among the Imāmīya and other groups, and in fact exhibit features that bring them closer to the *adab* literature that was so prominent at the Buwayhid court where al-Ṣadūq was active. Both of these chapters, moreover, will incorporate

extensive reviews of current scholarship on these areas. As observed above, scholarship on al-Ṣadūq to date has almost exclusively considered him as a legal-theological scholar, and thus it is in Chapter I that we will be reviewing the state of scholarship on al-Ṣadūq himself, and in turn what that scholarship has to say about his legal-theological thought. Chapter II, meanwhile, concerns an aspect of al-Ṣadūq's work that has been almost completely ignored, and therefore has little to review in terms of studies of al-Ṣadūq himself. There is, however, a great deal of scholarship on the nature of *adab* literature in the premodern period and how it relates to other literatures and intellectual frameworks. Our examination of al-Ṣadūq's relationship with *adab* and *adab* literature will therefore necessitate extensive engagement with that body of work.

## **2. Reading al-Ṣadūq**

Following the first section's reckoning of al-Ṣadūq in his broad context, in this section we embark on close readings of two of his most important works. In Chapter III we examine *al-Tawḥīd*, an extended polemic of theology and epistemology that takes as its starting point the nature of the divine, and in Chapter IV we look at *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma*, a work on the occultation of the Twelfth Imām.

These extended readings of individual works are a product of the focus on compilation discussed above that is applied across this thesis. While the detailed interrogation of how al-Ṣadūq compiles his transmitted materials will be vital to the studies conducted in Section I, the project pursued here to develop that approach in the chapter-length study of single works has a number of benefits. The first of these is purely demonstrative. In these two chapters we will see something of the extent of al-Ṣadūq's sophistication as an author, observing how he enacts intricate and extremely potent addresses to the reader which he can sustain, develop and expand across hundreds of pages. It is in Section II that we see how a compilation can work as an interconnected whole, the understanding of one part of it inescapably conditioned by the workings of other parts, and ultimately by overarching structures of meaning that al-Ṣadūq the compiler effects across the work. It is here that the discussion of compilation above will become most relevant, and these readings will also build on the discussions of understandings of, approaches to and even philosophies of compilation current amongst al-Ṣadūq's contemporaries that make up parts of Chapter I and especially Chapter II.

In establishing that these works can and indeed should be read in this manner, these two chapters meanwhile deliver important conclusions about the image of al-Ṣadūq established in Section I and how we may go about constructing and developing that image. In both *al-Tawḥīd*

and *Kamāl al-dīn* al-Ṣadūq gives an account of the doctrinal questions raised in each texts that far exceeds what might be summarised in the brief dicta of a creed. Questions of the imāms' theological knowledge, the limits of human reason and the nature of the Twelfth Imām's occultation are subject to prolonged meditations, meditations which do not dwell on the clarification of technical minutiae (and often test the limits thereof), describing to the reader through assembled *aḥādīth* the lived reality of his relationship with the imāms and with their reported words. Al-Ṣadūq's theological contentions in these compendia are inextricably intertwined with the medium of compilation through which he gives them expression, and in reading them we come to see that a full understanding of him as a scholar cannot rest only on isolated statements of conviction and polemic, but must rather be acquainted with the literary dynamics by which his ideas are conveyed.

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## THE WORKS OF AL-ṢADŪQ

Before we begin there is first offered an overview of al-Ṣadūq's extant oeuvre, listing each of his surviving works with a brief description of their contents as well as a guide as to where they will be discussed in this study.

- *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, 'Every Man His Own Jurist'<sup>60</sup> (*al-Faqīh*) - al-Ṣadūq's most famous surviving work and also his largest, as already mentioned it is now counted as one of the four canonical books of Imāmī *ḥadīth*. Not unlike other members of this quartet, *al-Faqīh* does not entirely resemble the encyclopaedic model followed by the books of the Sunnī canon. For one thing, as its title suggests, it only concerns matters of law. For another, it does not include the *asānīd* of the *aḥādīth* it collects. As al-Ṣadūq explains in his introduction, this is a book to guide the faithful effectively and conveniently in matters of law, and including *asānīd* would only make it cumbersome. The book follows the customary structure of a legal manual, and while most injunctions are affirmed mostly by collected *ḥadīth*, many are accompanied by al-Ṣadūq's own clarifications and summaries and others consist only of al-Ṣadūq's words with no supporting *ḥadīth*. Most of our discussion of *al-*

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<sup>60</sup> This translation was coined by Fyzee.



*Faqīh* is found in Chapter I, but as the chief exemplar of al-Ṣadūq writing with the voice of the instructor of the Imāmī faithful it will remain a key point of comparison across the thesis.

- *Al-I'tiqādāt*, 'Beliefs'<sup>61</sup> – al-Ṣadūq's creed, this invaluable text outlines al-Ṣadūq's opinion of the correct Imāmī belief on a wide range of subjects, including core doctrines like the nature of God, the infallibility of the Imām and the punishment of sinners, but also a few subjects less usual in a creed such as how to confront contradictions in *ḥadīth*. It is one of al-Ṣadūq's best known works thanks to Fyzee's translation, and as well as its value to the study of al-Ṣadūq still numbers among a fairly small number of published creeds from the early centuries of Islam. While it is not a *ḥadīth* compendium, consisting in the main of al-Ṣadūq's prose which he then supports with *aḥādīth*, it is an essential point of reference for understanding al-Ṣadūq, its utility as an example of al-Ṣadūq discussing theological matters in a didactic register corresponding to that of *al-Faqīh*'s representation of his mode of legal instruction. As such it is similarly taken as a point of reference across the thesis.
- *Al-Hidāya*, 'Guidance' – A short work, *al-Hidāya* is a brief guide to being an Imāmī. It begins with a short creed giving central beliefs, followed by a manual of laws. The former is shorter than *al-I'tiqādāt*, while the latter is nowhere near as comprehensive as *al-Faqīh*, but follows a similar model, combining al-Ṣadūq's prose with supporting *aḥādīth*, mostly without full *asānīd*. It answers few questions that *al-Faqīh* and *al-I'tiqādāt* do not, but nonetheless provides the present study with occasional points of reference and comparison.
- *Al-Muqni'*, 'Assurance' – This work is very similar to *al-Hidāya* except that it includes no creed section, rather it consists only of a short legal manual. Like *al-Hidāya* it receives little direct study in what follows but serves as a valuable example of a particular style of writing.
- *Al-Khiṣāl*, 'The Quantities/Numbers' – One of al-Ṣadūq's stranger texts, this long work amasses a very diverse range of *aḥādīth* and arranges them according to the numbers mentioned therein. It will be studied in depth in Chapter II.
- *'Ilal al-sharā'i'*, 'The Causes of Laws' (*'Ilal*) – Another unusual work, *'Ilal* gathers a very large and diverse body of *aḥādīth* under the rubric of causation. It will receive detailed study in Chapter II.
- *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma*, 'The Perfection of Religion and the Completion of Grace' (*Kamāl al-dīn*) – al-Ṣadūq's surviving work on the occultation of the Twelfth Imām. This work is the chief subject of Chapter IV.
- *'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, 'Wellsprings of the Traditions of al-Riḍā' (*'Uyūn*) – One of al-Ṣadūq's more popular works in the present day, *'Uyūn* presents a large number of traditions about al-Riḍā's life and death and an even larger number of traditions narrated from him

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<sup>61</sup> This work is listed under various titles, among them *I'tiqādāt al-Imāmīya* and *Risāla fī'l-ī'tiqādāt*.

containing his teachings. It is also distinguished by being al-Ṣadūq's only work written for a named patron, the Buwayhid vizier of Rayy al-Ṣāhib b. 'Abbād. Some aspects of the work are discussed in Chapter II, however much of it left without discussion in what follows. This is partly due to the fact that al-Ṣadūq's presentation of al-Riḍā, a key component of the book, has received some study by Cooperson,<sup>62</sup> but partly also as an unfortunate result of the constraints of space.

- *Al-Tawhīd*, 'Divine Oneness' – al-Ṣadūq's largest work on theological matters, *al-Tawhīd* is a large compendium of reports mostly pertaining to the nature of God. It is the chief subject of Chapter III.
- *Thawāb al-a'māl*, 'Deeds and their Rewards' – This short work collects *aḥādīth* in which are described the rewards for a variety of virtuous deeds. It stands alongside a number of al-Ṣadūq's works that exhort the reader to pious conduct through *aḥādīth* arranged around a particular theme, but in comparison to other such works, such as *'Ilal* and *al-Khiṣāl*, *Thawāb* is relatively unambitious, and its discussion here is therefore subordinated to that of more interesting works of this type. As such it receives some discussion in Chapter II.
- *'Iqāb al-a'māl*, 'Deeds and their Punishments' – Very much the sister work to *Thawāb*, *'Iqāb* is of near identical length and structure, except of course that the traditions are united by the theme of how wicked deeds will be punished. Like *Thawāb* this book is discussed in Chapter II but not as extensively as other works.
- *Muṣādaqa al-ikhwān*, 'Sincerity Amongst Brethren' – This small book enjoins the reader to treat his fellow believers with respect, collecting *aḥādīth* on the subject of the righteous conduct among Muslims. It is discussed extensively in Chapter II.
- *Ṣiḥāṭ al-shī'a*, 'The Attributes of the Shī'a' (*Ṣiḥāṭ*) – This work gathers *aḥādīth* in which are discussed and enumerated the distinguishing moral and pious characteristics of the Shī'a. It is studied in Chapter II.
- *Faḍā'il al-shī'a*, 'The Virtues of the Shī'a' (*Faḍā'il*) – Subtly different to *Ṣiḥāṭ*, *Faḍā'il*'s *aḥādīth* speak of the exalted position of the Shī'a. It, too, is studied in Chapter II.
- *Al-Mawā'iz*, 'The 'Sermons'' – This book collects texts from the imāms for their kerygmatic value. It contains short aphorisms and maxims, but also stirring sermons which exhort the faithful to piety with powerful rhetoric, amongst them texts which al-Sharīf al-Raḍī would later deem of sufficient aesthetic quality to be included in his *Nahj al-balāgha*. It is discussed in Chapter II.
- *Al-Amālī*, 'Dictations' – It is common for Buwayhid Imāmī scholars to leave works of 'dictations' (*amālī*) in which are recorded individual teaching sessions in which the author narrates *aḥādīth* to students. Alongside al-Ṣadūq, al-Mufīd and al-Ṭūsī also leave collections

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<sup>62</sup> See Cooperson, pp. 70-106. See also Lazarus-Yafeh, *passim*.

of *amālī*. Their wide-ranging subject matter makes these books an invaluable source for the *aḥādīth* in circulation in this period, but as yet no study has been made of their workings. Were they collected during an author's lifetime, under the author's supervision and sanction? To what extent are they an accurate representation of oral teaching practices (as their form indicates they may well be)? al-Ṣadūq's *al-Amālī* is not much discussed in this thesis. This is partly as a result of this set of unanswered questions that surround the work, but more specifically because what purports to be a student's record of al-Ṣadūq's dictations has an unclear role in a study of al-Ṣadūq's own practices of written compilation. Ostensibly all *al-Amālī* can tell us is how al-Ṣadūq chose to communicate when using the format of brief dictation sessions in which he relayed only a handful of *aḥādīth*. In the other compendia listed here, those that he authored himself as written works, he constructs an address out of hundreds of *aḥādīth*, an address the complexity of which entirely reflects this scope, and it is these authorial efforts that this thesis takes as its focus.

- *Faḍā'il al-ashhur al-thalātha*, 'The Virtues of the Three Months' – This little book gathers *aḥādīth* extolling the virtues of the months of Rajab, Sha'bān and Ramaḍān. These virtues in the main take the form of the particular rewards that await those who act piously in these months and especially those who perform supererogatory acts of worship. Alongside the book's exhortations to such devotion many of its *aḥādīth* also supply the details of particular rites and practices that should be pursued by the God-fearing Muslim. Even more so than *Thawāb* and *Iqāb*, this work appears as a fairly uncomplicated exhortation to piety, and is therefore not much discussed here.
- *Majālis ma'a Rukn al-Dawla*, 'The Counsels Before Rukn al-Dawla' – The given title is only the shortest of a number attached to this work, which is sometimes listed as five separate works each containing one counsel.<sup>63</sup> These narrated counsels take place at the court of the Buwayhid prince Rukn al-Dawla, in which the prince consults al-Ṣadūq on various matters and receives wise answers. This is not the only time we read of al-Ṣadūq's interactions with Rukn al-Dawla; al-Ṣadūq also narrates exchanges with him in *Kamāl al-dīn* and more briefly in *Uyūn*,<sup>64</sup> and in these texts he appears as a wise and sympathetic sovereign (in contrast to the other potentate with whom al-Ṣadūq is recorded as having dealings, ibn 'Abbād). It is potentially of great interest, given its rare portrayal of al-Ṣadūq's style of discourse and argument, which appears as a combination of reason and text.<sup>65</sup> It is narrated in

<sup>63</sup> See al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 373.

<sup>64</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 117, *Uyūn*, vol. ii, p. 312.

<sup>65</sup> This is interesting given the stern injunctions against dialectic levelled by al-Ṣadūq in other texts (e.g. *al-I'tiqādāt*, p. 70). Nonetheless, it should be noted that a very similar style of mixing text and reason is in evidence in *al-I'tiqādāt* itself and *Kamāl al-dīn*, such that this work does not tell us anything especially new in this regard. As to whether the styles observable here and in his other texts are completely identical, this is a question which for now must remain unanswered.

the third person, thus rendering it unclear whether it was actually written by al-Ṣadūq himself. Furthermore, the current edited version is incomplete. This is a fascinating little text and merits detailed study. However, even more so than in the case of *al-Amālī*, the uncertainty of its exact provenance and its correspondingly unclear pertinence to al-Ṣadūq's approach to *ḥadīth* have allowed it little room for discussion in the following pages. The provenance and history of the work has received brief discussion by Ansari.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ansari, '*Bar resī*'.

## **SECTION I**

### ***Placing al-Şadūq***

**GHAYBA – Tradition and Innovation Among the Tenth-Century Imāmīya**

**INTRODUCTION – *Absence***

This chapter re-examines al-Ṣadūq's place in the context in which he is most commonly located: the development of Imāmī legal and theological thought in the first century of the occultation of the Twelfth Imām. We will begin with a comprehensive review of scholarship on al-Ṣadūq as a jurist and theologian to date, noting in particular a number of deep ambiguities, liminalities and unanswered questions that surface in the view of his significance found therein. We will then turn to his works and attempt to clarify and answer these questions, and in so doing provide an anatomy of the key dynamics of how his compiling of the imāms' *ḥadīth* relates to the changes and challenges facing Imāmī legal-theological thought in this age of transition. We shall above all aim to provide as complete and contextualised a picture as we can of al-Ṣadūq's methods of compilation and his approach to the essential concerns of compiling *ḥadīth* within a legal-theological context: concerns such as the authenticity of *aḥādīth* and the role of reason in their interpretation and application.

The study of Imāmī thought in this period is dominated by the concept of absence for two reasons. The first of these is an absence of evidence. It is from the next generation of Imāmī scholars, in particular al-Ṣadūq's student al-Mufīd, that we receive the first substantial Imāmī literature on systematic theology and jurisprudence. For al-Ṣadūq's and previous generations, meanwhile, we have very little extant other than *ḥadīth* compendia with little or no discussion of methodology, leaving deep uncertainties about the nature of Imāmī thought at the time, including how *aḥādīth* were compiled. This is in contrast to other groups in this period, in particular the Mu'tazilīs, the Ḥanafīs and the Shāfi'īs, for whom we already have substantial literatures discussing problems of authenticity and transmission of texts as well as hermeneutics of application and detailed discussions of the role of reason and revelation. What the Imāmīya made of such questions meanwhile remains based largely on conjecture from the few, often taciturn extant contemporary sources and later bibliographical literature.

The paucity of sources stems not least from the fact that the Imāmīya were a small group, but they were also a group undergoing profound changes. The second absence with which we must contend is the new reality of the absence of the imām facing the fourth/tenth-century

Imāmīya, following the acceptance of occultation around the beginning of the century. Adjusting to an epistemology that was not distinguished by the presence of a living successor to the Prophet's authority at its centre, something that other Shī'ī groups still maintained,<sup>67</sup> was a transformation of daunting proportions for the Imāmī intellectual elite, and the negotiation of the imām's looming absence remained a perennial concern. This highly unusual epistemological dilemma only complicates the historian's task of reconstructing Imāmī thought in this period. Not only do we lack evidence, but the evidence we do have points to the highly unusual and unsettled character of the Imāmī community at this time, rendering analogy both with the better-known development of other groups and the later, more familiar stages of Imāmī thought all the more difficult. This is only exacerbated by the arrival of the Buwayhids in the middle of the century, inaugurating the far-reaching changes to the Imāmīs' political circumstances discussed above.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW – *al-Ṣadūq in Between*

If these ambiguities of al-Ṣadūq's position are evident in this barest of historical frameworks, they are firmly reinforced by scholarship on the period. Al-Ṣadūq is a regular appearance in studies of Imāmī thought in the tenth century, studies which have increased in number and scope in the past three decades.<sup>68</sup> However, he is hardly ever the central focus of such studies, despite his formidable oeuvre, and a survey of scholarly literature reveals to the contrary that he is consistently allotted an anomalously marginal place in views on the Imāmīya at this time.

This sidelining of al-Ṣadūq is no coincidence. Rather it is the product of a tenacious set of categories and periodisations which dominate the study of the Imāmīya in the tenth century. It is these patterns of study which have engendered the perception of him as representing a liminal, transitional space between more important figures and events. In this review of scholarship on al-Ṣadūq, then, we must pay due attention to the patterns of understanding that have consistently engendered a depreciation of his value as an object of study. We shall

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<sup>67</sup> The Ismā'īlī Fāṭimids had swept to power in North Africa in the first half of the fourth/tenth century, finally conquering Egypt in 358/969, in whom their Ismā'īlī followers revered both a temporal ruler and a divinely appointed imām (other Ismā'īlī groups did continue in opposition to the Fāṭimid imāmate, most prominently the Qarāmiṭa). The Zaydīs, meanwhile, had seen the rise of successful (if short-lived) imāmates in Yemen and northern Iran, and meanwhile unlike the Imāmīs maintained a concept of the imamate as something that could be established at any time by a legitimate claimant, rather than as a distant eschatological event.

<sup>68</sup> Most prominent of these are those of Modarressi, *Crisis*; Bayhom-Daou, *Al-Mufid*; Melchert, 'Imāmīs'; McDermott, Stewart, *Orthodoxy*; Gleave; Newman, *Formative Period*; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*; Madelung, 'Imāmism'; Sander; Marcinowski.

examine in turn how this leaves to waste a valuable resource for a significant and poorly understood period in Islamic intellectual history, and how a close look at al-Ṣadūq's abundant extant writings alongside those of his contemporaries can remedy some distortions in the generally held assumptions regarding the development of the Imāmī community. As the above historical outline has shown, al-Ṣadūq's position at a transitional point in Imāmī intellectual history is indubitable, but rather than meriting his marginalisation, we shall explore how this renders him a vital window onto the nature of the formative transformations of which he was part.

We shall have much occasion below to discuss how al-Ṣadūq's Imāmī contemporaries, most notably al-Mufīd, found fault with his work. Before that, however, we shall see that responses of criticism and bewilderment are far more widespread, and in fact are a frequent sight in modern scholarly discussions of al-Ṣadūq. McDermott describes him variously as 'clumsy,' 'rambling' and 'cryptic.'<sup>69</sup> Bayhom-Daou dismisses perceived contradictory statements as 'paradoxical' and laments the poor quality of his theological prose as evidence of his lack of training in this area,<sup>70</sup> while Madelung describes al-Ṣadūq as employing 'arbitrary interpretations' of *aḥādīth*.<sup>71</sup> Beyond outright denigration, however, there is a great deal of ambiguous language, not without its own contradictions, in scholars' assessments of him. For Ali Adam he confronting rationalist challenges with a traditionalist methodology,<sup>72</sup> for Melchert he is a semi-rationalist,<sup>73</sup> for McDermott he is a traditionalist with Mu'tazilī sentiments.<sup>74</sup> This plethora of curious, chimerical monikers can only speak of a pervasive unease about how to relate al-Ṣadūq to the paradigms and dichotomies with which his context is usually viewed, a state of affairs which may also give rise to scholars' resorting to outright criticism of his work.

Al-Ṣadūq is greatly overshadowed in scholarship by his erstwhile student al-Mufīd. In contrast to the uncertain hybridity with which al-Ṣadūq is discussed, al-Mufīd is considered a definitive and momentous figure in Imāmī history. Scholarly testaments to this are as numerous as they are diverse: Amir Moezzi points to al-Mufīd as the death-knell of 'primitive, esoteric, nonrational Shī'ism' and the corresponding beginning of rationalist legalism amongst Imāmīs;<sup>75</sup> Stewart, meanwhile, identifies al-Mufīd as the first head of an Imāmī school of law;<sup>76</sup> Madelung argues al-Mufīd's significance as the beginning of Mu'tazilī theology's

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<sup>69</sup> McDermott, pp. 324-325.

<sup>70</sup> Bayhom-Daou, *Al-Mufīd*, p. 94.

<sup>71</sup> Madelung, 'Imāmism', p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> Adam, p. 9

<sup>73</sup> Melchert, 'Imāmīs', passim.

<sup>74</sup> McDermott, p. 369.

<sup>75</sup> Amir-Moezzi, 'Remarques', pp. 17-20, *Divine Guide*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>76</sup> Stewart, *Orthodoxy* pp. 128-129.



successful incorporation into Imāmī thought.<sup>77</sup> Al-Mufīd's pivotal role as embodying the beginning of a new, Buyayhid, post-occultation Imāmī scholarship is to be found affirmed in a continuing succession of works on Shī'ism.<sup>78</sup>

There is no doubt that al-Mufīd cuts a decisive figure in Imāmī history. It is in his writings that we first see what will become the definitive features of Imāmī scholarship in the Buwayhid period and beyond: the incorporation a distinctive Imāmī imamology into a strongly Mu'tazilī-leaning theological framework and a correspondingly rigorous interrogation of the sources of law, underpinned with substantial methodological literature. We moreover see in al-Mufīd organisational innovations in the Imāmīya, moving towards an institutionalised Imāmī school of law after the model of those emerging among the Sunnīs.<sup>79</sup>

What is less clear is how al-Mufīd's apparent importance should affect our view of earlier scholars. In identifying al-Mufīd as a point of departure, there is an unfortunate temptation to consequently see earlier authors as primitive, their less-successful endeavours serving only to point towards al-Mufīd's subsequent triumph. Many studies take al-Mufīd as their starting point, emphasising the image as his predecessors as just that: primarily serving to prefigure and anticipate al-Mufīd, and thus worthy of study only as marginalia.<sup>80</sup> This is exacerbated further by the nature of the literary record, with the lack of systematic theology or jurisprudence in earlier authors' extant works leading some scholars to despair of extracting workable understandings of their thought.

A change that has occurred in the last thirty years has been an increased interest in the earlier history of Imāmī Shī'ism. This has been occasioned to a great extent by a newly available set of texts that greatly increase our capacity to study the Imāmīya from first-hand sources even back into the ninth century. Though works are still published that cite al-Kulaynī as the beginning of Imāmī *ḥadīth* scholarship, a growing body of scholarship is applying fruitful analysis to such earlier scholars as al-Barqī and al-Ṣaffār, with the result that we now have a detailed and growing understanding of Imāmī intellectual life up to a century before al-Mufīd.

Himself a predecessor of al-Mufīd himself, this would appear to be good news for the study of al-Ṣadūq. In practice, however, this new interest in the earlier Imāmīya has tended to create a second centre of gravity centred around the beginning of the tenth century, leaving al-Ṣadūq just as much on the periphery as does the focus on al-Mufīd at the beginning of the eleventh

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<sup>77</sup> Madelung, 'Imāmism', pp. 23-30).

<sup>78</sup> Newman, *Twelver Shī'ism*; Haider, *Introduction*; Daftary, *History*.

<sup>79</sup> Stewart, *Orthodoxy*, pp. 128-129; Gleave, pp. 381-382.

<sup>80</sup> Halm, *Shī'ism*; Calder, 'Doubt and Prerogative'; 'Authority'.

century. Newman's 'The Formative Period of Twelver Shī'ism,' ends its eponymous formative period with al-Kulaynī.<sup>81</sup> Greatly influential, meanwhile, is Amir Moezzi's hypothesis of an original, nonrational, esoteric and initiatic Shī'ism, one that he ambitiously traces to the imāms themselves. Amir Moezzi points to the extravagant cosmological and imamological elements of the works of al-Ṣaffār and al-Barqī in particular, ideas such as precreation, metemphosis and the super-existence of the imām, ideas in which al-Mufīd and his successors take a pronounced disinterest and, indeed, tend to regard as 'exaggeration' (*ghuluww*).<sup>82</sup> Viložny's research takes a more concentrated approach to the same phenomenon, attempting to reconstruct the cosmology, indeed the mythology of these early Imāmīs.<sup>83</sup> The focus thus remains decisively before al-Ṣadūq. While Amir-Moezzi names al-Mufīd as the point where this distinct, earlier form of Imāmism was extinguished, in practice the last author in whose work he decisively identifies its presence in al-Kulaynī.<sup>84</sup> Bar Asher, meanwhile, in his study of exegetical literature from the same period, identifies a distinctive 'pre-Buwayhid' school of exegesis peculiar to this early period, the last representative of which is al-Kulaynī's student al-Nu'mānī (d. 345/956).<sup>85</sup>

Al-Ṣadūq is thus placed in an ambiguous *barzakh* between a pre-Buwayhid 'non-rationalism' that ends with al-Kulaynī and the Buwayhid rationalism inaugurated by al-Mufīd. It is little surprise, therefore, that he is described with consistently mixed terminology. What is more surprising is that his position between these two apparently disparate intellectual moments in Imāmī thought does not merit more attention. The increased attention given to the distinctiveness of Imāmī thought at the beginning of the tenth century only heightens the dramatic shift that must take place during its course to arrive at al-Mufīd a few decades later, a shift that is little understood and on which al-Ṣadūq perfectly placed to shed light.<sup>86</sup>

## CHALLENGING MUFID-CENTRISM

There have recently emerged a number of studies which do reconsider the transformative role of al-Mufīd. A pioneering work in this regard and one of the most extensive to date is Sander's 'Charisma und Ratio.' Sander here contends against the (at the time near-unanimous)

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<sup>81</sup> Newman, *Formative Period*.

<sup>82</sup> Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, passim.

<sup>83</sup> Viložny (2007).

<sup>84</sup> See Amir-Moezzi & Ansari, pp. 124-160.

<sup>85</sup> Bar-Asher.

<sup>86</sup> Marcinkowski points to al-Ṣadūq as a transitional figure between these changes in circumstance, but does not much delve into how this is reflected in his writings.

scholarly grain that al-Mufīd in fact has a great deal in common with earlier Imāmī theologians. This affirmation of continuation with the earlier tenth century holds promise for a more exacting verdict on the position and role of al-Ṣadūq, however, as we shall see, Sander's study in fact produces the exact opposite, his interrogation of the place of al-Mufīd seeming strangely to emphasise the uncertain place of al-Ṣadūq and deemphasise his significance.

Sander's study takes the form of a survey of Imāmī theology from the late ninth to the early eleventh centuries, examining the works of al-Barqī, al-Kulaynī, al-Ṣadūq and al-Mufīd to show principally that there is considerable continuity between these four figures. In so doing he challenges the generally held position that al-Mufīd's work constitutes a transformative shift towards the positions of the Mu'tazila, affirming that his theology overlaps far more closely with his Imāmī predecessors, and indeed that he has no more in common with his Mu'tazilī contemporaries than he has with their traditionist Sunnī opponents.<sup>87</sup>

Sander articulates his hypothesis principally in opposition to Madelung's early work on Imāmī-Mu'tazilī relations.<sup>88</sup> As such his conclusions rest not least on a methodological challenge to the latter. Madelung declares that the *ḥadīth* compendia of al-Kulaynī cannot be used as workable sources for the theological thought of the author and thus of Imāmīs in the earlier tenth century, due to their nature as compilations of disparate, transmitted *akhbār* rather than systematic theological discourse.<sup>89</sup> Sander denies this, contending that though the compilations' format is a hindrance they can nonetheless give voice to the doctrines held by the compiler. Not only is al-Kulaynī unlikely to include material that he considers heretical, but many *ḥadīth* themselves contain developed theological argument (as is to be expected in a corpus originating in the eighth and ninth centuries), giving a picture of al-Kulaynī and al-Barqī's doctrines that is perfectly adequate to support Sander's assertions of continuity with al-Mufīd.<sup>90</sup> His conclusion about theological continuity thus rests upon contentions about the nature and legibility of *ḥadīth* compendia as theological texts, an assertion of great value to the study of a figure like al-Ṣadūq whose works are overwhelmingly dominated by such compendia.

When it comes to al-Ṣadūq, however, Sander provides surprisingly few answers. We are informed that this will be the case as Sander opens his chapter on al-Ṣadūq with the disclaimer that al-Ṣadūq will not be treated with the same degree of detail as al-Barqī, al-Kulaynī or al-

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<sup>87</sup> Sander.

<sup>88</sup> Madelung, 'Imāmism'. The views expressed in this article, to which Sander was reacting, have more recently been partially updated. See below.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>90</sup> Sander, pp. 18, 123-128.

Mufīd, meriting comment only as and when he constitutes a significant departure from his predecessors and successor.<sup>91</sup> He does not justify this at length, however the reason seems clear for the work's objectives: if Sander has identified common ground between al-Kulaynī and al-Mufīd, he only needs to note that al-Ṣadūq does not constitute any disruption of this continuity. But Sander leaves significant ambiguities which overstep this practicality. Foremost among these is a conspicuous taxonomical uncertainty: Al-Kulaynī and al-Barqī share a chapter, into which they are grouped as 'the traditionists,' whereas al-Ṣadūq, allotted a separate chapter, is implicitly rendered outside this category, but without indication of what he is instead. This, it should be recalled, stands alongside the fact that the compilation of traditions makes up the overwhelming majority of al-Ṣadūq's oeuvre, accompanied by his numerous statements declaring the absolute epistemological sovereignty of traditions over reason,<sup>92</sup> and indeed al-Mufīd's denunciation of him as excessively reliant on traditions.<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, Sander's discussions consistently address al-Mufīd, al-Ṣadūq and 'the traditionists' as separate categories. If al-Ṣadūq is not a traditionist in the same way as al-Barqī and al-Kulaynī, what is he? On the whole, Sander seems to concur with Madelung et al. that al-Ṣadūq is to be located in a kind of intermediate space between 'true' traditionism and attempted rapprochement with rationalist currents.<sup>94</sup> Though his conclusion indicates that al-Ṣadūq's theology does not differ significantly either from al-Mufīd or from al-Barqī, despite the many changes in circumstance that divide them, he conversely suggests, too, that al-Ṣadūq belongs outside Buwayhid Imāmism proper. He points to the doctrines of al-Kulaynī, al-Ṣadūq and al-Barqī concerning the nature of God's will as reflective of an Imāmī minority complex in their difficult circumstances, driving them to shape elaborate theologies to explain their community's diminutive and disenfranchised status. Pointing to al-Mufīd as the point where this changes and identifying Buwayhid tolerance as facilitating that change, he thus places al-Ṣadūq solidly in the pre-Buwayhid intellectual world at least as far as his theology is concerned.<sup>95</sup>

Sander's conclusions<sup>96</sup> are of great interest and are supported by a valuable survey of the theological contents of al-Barqī and al-Kulaynī. However, the liminal position that he nonetheless ascribes to al-Ṣadūq is symptomatic of the fact that he leaves certain pivotal developments of the period unexplored. Firstly, Sander does not discuss the many areas, highlighted by Amir-Moezzi, Viložny and Bar-Asher, in which profound changes in belief do

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 165-166.

<sup>92</sup> E.g. *al-Tawhīd*, pp. 497-505.

<sup>93</sup> E.g. al-Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥ*, p. 50.

<sup>94</sup> Sander, pp. 19-24.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 214-215.

<sup>96</sup> Bayhom-Daou's more recent account of al-Mufīd concurs with Sander. See Bayhom-Daou, *Al-Mufīd*, passim.

occur between al-Barqī and al-Mufīd. While continuity can be observed in questions regarding God's attributes and his justice, great swathes of material from al-Barqī and his contemporaries regarding the extraordinary powers of the imām and his cosmic connection with the Shī'a find no echo in al-Mufīd, the latter having decisively rejected these aspects of the theology of the earlier Imāmīya.<sup>97</sup> Sander defends his selection of topics for comparison by asserting the centrality of the relationship between man and God to any theology,<sup>98</sup> but while this may be true of Muslim theology in general it neglects the fact that it is precisely in humanity's relationship with the imām that Imāmī theology distinguishes itself from other groups, and that to neglect this most definitive of subjects can only harm his study's capacity to be representative of the corpus it discusses.

Secondly, in Sander's valuable assertion that the early *ḥadīth* compendia are valuable sources of theological doctrine, thus facilitating the comparison with al-Mufīd's dialectic texts, he shifts his analysis away from the fact that however similar their doctrines may be, al-Barqī and al-Mufīd differ profoundly in how those doctrines are expressed. Al-Barqī leaves us only *ahādīth* without authorial comment on their content or their provenance, whereas al-Mufīd delivers densely argued positions supported both by rational tools and by *ahādīth* the sources of which are expressly scrutinised. Sander does not challenge that such a shift takes place, only implying in his conclusions that this change had little effect on some of the Imāmīya's central theological beliefs.<sup>99</sup> His focus thus remains squarely on doctrines without interrogating the methodologies whereby those doctrines were arrived at. The demonstration that these methodological changes took place while leaving some doctrines unaffected is a valuable one, but in omitting questions methodology and indeed of epistemology, combined with the doctrinal discontinuities that it leaves unaddressed, Sander's study does little to alter the picture of al-Mufīd as a radical departure from earlier Imāmism, leaving al-Ṣadūq's marginalisation between the two unaltered.

Sander's choice to focus on theology has, meanwhile, been emulated by subsequent scholarly challenges to the model of al-Mufīd as a point of radical transition. Madelung has in more recent work revisited the question of Imāmī theology before al-Mufīd, and concluded that it has a great deal in common with the Mu'tazila, echoing Sander's view that al-Mufīd's role was not a transformative one.<sup>100</sup> The conclusion is, of course, an ironic one given the starting point of Sander's hypothesis as being in opposition to Madelung's earlier article, and indeed

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<sup>97</sup> See Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*; Bar-Asher, Vilozny, 'Life Cycle'.

<sup>98</sup> Sander, pp. 3-4, 25-27.

<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Sander does not much interrogate perhaps the most interesting question arising from his study, namely how it comes to be that the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus such as is in the hands of al-Barqī and al-Kulaynī is so forthcoming with doctrinal positions amenable to Mu'tazilī positions.

<sup>100</sup> Madelung, 'Early Imāmī Theology', p. 468.

there are number of points on which Madelung's more recent writing on early Imāmī theology relates to the former conclusions with which Sander was contending. Chief among these is the nature of *al-Kāfī* as a viable source of al-Kulaynī's views. Madelung's article is thoroughly focussed on *al-Kāfī*, but as a source for the views of the imāms themselves in the second/eighth century, to whom al-Kulaynī's *aḥādīth* are attributed, and their followers at that time, rather than of the scholar who compiled these *aḥādīth* almost two hundred years later. Though he does not address the question of the authenticity of al-Kulaynī's material, Madelung makes it clear that he considers it a reliable testament to the views of the imāms themselves. Significantly, the point where he acknowledges that the views he is discussing are those of 'the Imams as presented by al-Kulaynī' is his rejection of Amir-Moezzi's view that the 'intellect' (*ʿaql*) referred to in al-Kulaynī's text refers to a superhuman 'hiero-intelligence,' and thus Amir-Moezzi's blurring of the common distinction between 'extremist' and 'moderate' Imāmīs, the relationship between al-Kulaynī and slightly earlier Imāmī works like those of al-Ṣaffār which unquestionably contain extremist elements.<sup>101</sup> The article's very plausible assertion that the imāms espoused some Mu'tazilī beliefs<sup>102</sup> therefore circumvents the question of how and to what extent this was reflected in the views of subsequent generations of Imāmīs, who were functioning at an ever-increasing distance from the direct authority of the imām, and indeed how this effected their practical relationship with the Mu'tazilīs themselves. Madelung attributes to the imāms as encountered in al-Kulaynī's *aḥādīth* an 'unprecedented assertion of the primacy of reason over prophetic revelation in religion,' a position violently contradicted by both al-Ṣadūq and al-Kulaynī.<sup>103</sup>

It is Modarressi's contention that the later Imāmīya were compelled to adopt views that the imāms themselves rejected for the sake of cohesion amongst the group, most significantly the very same views on the superhuman nature of the imāms that Madelung denies are present in *al-Kāfī* (saying nothing of al-Ṣaffār, al-Barqī or, indeed al-Ṣadūq).<sup>104</sup> If this is so (and it has never been seriously challenged) then the suggestion that the imāms themselves subscribed to some Mu'tazilī views does not equate to simple continuity between them and al-Mufīd. The question becomes that of how the imāms' views were processed and transmitted by later Imāmī scholars, a question that has received extremely little discussion in scholarship on the early Imāmīya and one that is central to that with which we began this chapter: what is the scholars' approach to *ḥadīth*?<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Madelung, 'Early Imāmī Theology', p. 467.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 468. The view has since been upheld by Schmidtke & Ansari.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 466.

<sup>104</sup> Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 19-48.

<sup>105</sup> It is Melchert's valuable contention that the most useful taxonomy with which to study the intellectual movements of this period is not monikers like 'Ḥanafī' and 'Mu'tazilī' but rather with the

## UṢŪL AL-FIQH – Reason and Tradition

The great majority of the studies cited above have been concerned with theology rather than law, and as such have not been much addressed to questions of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). It is in jurisprudential literature, conversely, that questions of scholars' approach to *ḥadīth* are usually discussed, and this theological focus of scholarship of fourth/tenth-century Imāmī thought has correspondingly remained distant from such questions. Indeed, more studies have, like Madelung, pronounced on the capacity of the modern scholar to determine the authenticity or otherwise of the *aḥādīth* in these compendia than on what the compilers themselves made of this task.<sup>106</sup>

A notable exception to this tendency to prioritise the theological over the jurisprudential is Stewart's 'Islamic Legal Orthodoxy.' Though this work undertakes to examine the Shī'ī tradition over a much longer timeframe than concerns us here, still its analysis of the earlier period is invaluable. Stewart frames his study into an enquiry across a millennium of Imāmī legal tradition into how Imāmī Shī'ism has responded to what Stewart identifies as the majoritarian monopoly on orthodoxy, mobilised primarily through the concept of consensus (*ijmā'*) wielded by the Sunnī schools of law from the fourth/tenth century onwards.<sup>107</sup> Imāmīs, Stewart suggests, have historically had three options available to them in responding to this attempted imposition and exclusion by the Sunnī majority: conformance to consensus, adoption of consensus or rejection of consensus.<sup>108</sup> What is significant to us is how he uses this schema to interpret the Imāmī community of the tenth century. Stewart points to the formation of institutionalised Sunnī schools of law at this time as institutional entities that functioned systematically to train professional scholars,<sup>109</sup> and with them the development of the doctrine of consensus as a means of claiming orthodoxy (those who broke with consensus being condemned as heretics and even as apostates) as the central challenge to which the Imāmīs had to respond. As noted above, he identifies their most successful response as the

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key methodological axis of traditionism and rationalism; it is in scholars' comparative attitudes to texts, not the theological doctrines they happen to arrive at from those texts, that give us the more substantial picture of their intellectual character. See Melchert, 'Imāmīs', p. 273.

<sup>106</sup> For a significant examination of the utility of the *asānīd* found in Shī'ī compendia to shed light on earlier centuries see Haider, *Origins*, pp. 24-53.

<sup>107</sup> See above.

<sup>108</sup> Stewart, *Orthodoxy*, pp. 52-59.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

formation in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries of an Imāmī school of law after the same institutional model under al-Mufīd, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī.<sup>110</sup>

The utility of this observation is its drawing attention to the key ambiguities and anomalies of the position of al-Ṣadūq and his fellow scholars in the earlier fourth/tenth century. If, in contradistinction to the Sunnīs, they were not operating as a school of law in the full, institutional sense, what were the methodological and ideological foundations of their scholarly activities? Stewart points to *uṣūl al-fiqh* and specifically to the production of manuals of *uṣūl al-fiqh* as key to the functioning of such schools. Did the Imāmīs before al-Mufīd have such manuals and, if so, what did they contain and to what extent was their content and, indeed, their necessity agreed upon? In identifying al-Mufīd as a point of departure, the first chief jurist of the Imāmīya,<sup>111</sup> Stewart contends in opposition to the theological picture discussed above that the scholars before al-Mufīd were doing something appreciably different to what we see in al-Mufīd's work. Moreover, Stewart has stated in a more recent work that by the early tenth century every group needed a manual of *uṣūl al-fiqh*.<sup>112</sup> The tenacious ambiguity surrounding the question of whether or not the Imāmīya fit this pattern underscores how different this group was from other legal traditions at the time of al-Ṣadūq.

Though it asks invaluable questions, Stewart's study does not dwell long on the nature of Imāmī jurisprudence in the earlier tenth century.<sup>113</sup> In attempting to identify a tradition of jurisprudence prior to al-Mufīd, Stewart focuses on two figures, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. al-Junayd al-Iskāfī (d. c. 360/970) and 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas'ūdī (d. 346/957).<sup>114</sup> While both authors are recorded as having authored works on jurisprudence, they are of limited use for supplying a general understanding of earlier Imāmī thought on the subject, let alone of conceiving of the roots of any kind of school. This is due to the fact that later Imāmī tradition, starting immediately with al-Iskāfī's student al-Mufīd, accords them only minimal influence amongst their fellow Imāmīs. Al-Iskāfī is singled out by al-Mufīd and the first bibliographers in the early fifth/eleventh century as having sanctioned the deviant practice of analogy, for which he was ostracised by most Imāmī scholars.<sup>115</sup> Al-Mas'ūdī, meanwhile, though acknowledged by the Imāmīya as one of their own, appears to be viewed from a distance by the subsequent tradition. No sources name any students of his, let alone students who

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<sup>110</sup> Stewart, *Orthodoxy*, pp. 111-133.

<sup>111</sup> This is supported by al-Ṭūsī who says of al-Mufīd that he held headship (*ri'āsa*) of the Imāmīya, a title he does not mention in connection with any earlier scholar. See al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, p. 157. The same position, moreover, is accorded him by Ibn al-Nadīm (*Fihrist*, p. 279).

<sup>112</sup> Stewart, 'Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī', pp. 347-348.

<sup>113</sup> Stewart (1998), pp. 137-143, 163-165.

<sup>114</sup> Stewart's identification of al-Mas'ūdī as an Imāmī follows increasing consensus on this point. See primarily Khalidī, *Islamic Historiography*, pp. 136-142.

<sup>115</sup> Al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, p. 134; al-Najāshī, *Rilaj*, p. 371; al-Mufīd, *al-Masā'il al-ṣāghānīya*, p. 18.



continued his teaching in jurisprudence, while al-Najāshī notes only that the noted scholar Abū al-Mufaḍḍal al-Shaybānī ‘claimed to have met him,’<sup>116</sup> seemingly setting him at a distance from the familiar scholarly context of Imāmī scholarship in Iraq and Iran. It is also the case that none of the most influential scholars of the generations before al-Mufīd, among them al-Mufīd’s most cited teacher in law Ja‘far b. Muḥammad ibn Qūlawayh (d. 367/998), al-Ṣadūq himself, al-Ṣadūq’s principle teachers, his father ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā b. Bābawayh (‘Ibn Bābawayh the Elder’) (d. 329/941) and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. al-Walīd (d. 343/954-5) and al-Kulaynī (who taught ibn Qūlawayh), are recorded as having written any works on jurisprudence. This suggests that if not jurisprudence itself then certainly the writing of manuals thereof was a decidedly fringe activity amongst the Imāmīya for several decades after it became an essential element of the Sunnī schools of law.

Lest we hasten from the above to a hazardously simplistic view of the Imāmīya at this time, we should emphasise that, with or without manuals of jurisprudence, there is clear evidence that methodological disputes were an established presence in Imāmī legal activity in this period. We should recall that al-Iskāfī was denounced for his sanctioning of analogy, and this is symptomatic of a pervasive discourse of such debates. A foundational work for understanding the early methodological concerns of the Imāmīya in the fourth/tenth century is Hossein Modarressi’s ‘Introduction to Shī‘ī Law.’ By drawing heavily on Shī‘ī bibliographical literature, Modarressi provides a schema of the different groups<sup>117</sup> within the Imāmīya and their relations to one another that is far more expansive than other studies of the period. Modarressi identifies three distinct strands of Imāmī thought in the generations before al-Mufīd: the rationalists, the traditionalists, and those who were between the two. Sure enough, he states that the rationalists were represented primarily by al-Iskāfī and Hasan b. ‘Alī b. Abī ‘Aqīl (d. mid fourth/centh century). Much later these two acquired the epithet ‘The Two Ancients’ (*al-qadīmān*) signifying their status as the earliest scholars to engage in the science of jurisprudence. Modarressi names al-Kulaynī and al-Ṣadūq as well as al-Ṣadūq’s teacher Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. al-Walīd as prominent representatives of the traditionists, while he identifies al-Ṣadūq’s father alongside ibn Qūlawayh as belonging to the intermediates.<sup>118</sup> The chief limitation of Modarressi’s work remains its brevity, constituting as it does only part of an introductory chapter in a survey of the entire Imāmī legal tradition. As such he only discusses the bases on which these groups were divided in the most general of

<sup>116</sup> Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 243-244.

<sup>117</sup> Modarressi uses the term ‘school’ for these groups and earlier ones, a usage of which Stewart is critical on the grounds that it should be reserved for the truly institutionalised bodies discussed above. We will here be following Stewart’s usage of the term, which follows that established by Melchert, Makdisi et al. See Stewart, *Orthodoxy*, p. 26, Melchert, *Formation*, Makdisi.

<sup>118</sup> Modarressi, *Introduction*, pp. 32-39.

terms, focussing on the extent to which principles of law and of jurisprudence were permissible to derive from the texts of the *aḥādīth* themselves.<sup>119</sup> Modarressi's schema, meanwhile, does not much touch on the institutional and comparative questions opened up later by Stewart. Nonetheless, it is a crucial starting point for mapping the intellectual landscape of the early Imāmīya regarding these methodological questions, and we shall have cause to return to his taxonomy when we analyse the primary sources in what follows.

A third useful model is supplied by Gleave, one which again achieves substantial differentiation of scholars according to their attitudes to text and reason. Comparing a set of *ḥadīth* compendia from al-Kulaynī to al-Ṭūsī,<sup>120</sup> Gleave points out a clear trajectory of development between the compilers, with each compiler more willing to supplement *aḥādīth* with his own views, summaries and commentary than those of previous generations. Thus al-Kulaynī gives almost no material beyond (albeit meticulously ordered) *aḥādīth*, al-Ṣadūq gives *aḥādīth* alongside his own regular summaries and asides, while with al-Mufīd and al-Ṭūsī (al-Ṭūsī's *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* supplying commentary on and expansion of al-Mufīd's *al-Muqni*) giving full discussion of technical problems, conflicting reports and so on. He thus points to a clear, steady increase in the role of reason between al-Kulaynī and al-Mufīd.<sup>121</sup> While we must avoid drawing the conclusion that this was a trajectory followed by all (it is clear that some earlier scholars like ibn Abī 'Aqīl were of a more rationalist persuasion than al-Ṣadūq, who flourished a little later), it certainly demonstrates that there is more than simple continuity at work between Buwayhid Imāmī scholarship and what came before, and that the comparative roles of *ḥadīth* and reason were an important part of the changes and developments that took place.

It is primarily in jurisprudence, then, not in theology, that we see the tenacious unanswered questions about the Imāmīya in al-Ṣadūq's era and the significance of those questions. A better understanding of the Imāmī approach to *ḥadīth* criticism in the decades before al-Mufīd would offer valuable insights into the clearly unusual nature of this group in the transformative century after the death of al-'Askarī, and indeed into the early history of *uṣūl al-fiqh* as a whole.<sup>122</sup> Al-Ṣadūq represents an invaluable resource for such an enquiry for two reasons. First is the unparalleled volume of literature that he leaves us, far greater than any other Imāmī scholar prior to al-Mufīd. The second reason is al-Ṣadūq's dates. Only a generation older than

<sup>119</sup> As we shall see, the imāms' *aḥādīth* potentially have a great deal to say on methodological matters.

<sup>120</sup> Gleave restricts his study to only the four canonical books of Imāmī *ḥadīth* (as they eventually were designated). Nonetheless, since *al-Kāfī* and *al-Faqīh* in particular are the only two substantial Imāmī legal works to survive from before al-Mufīd (particularly given that the two others, *al-Muqni* and *al-Hidāya*, were also written by al-Ṣadūq and differ little from *al-Faqīh* except for their smaller scale), it is a valuably illustrative sample.

<sup>121</sup> Gleave, pp. 381-382.

<sup>122</sup> Stewart, *Disagreements*, p. xxviii.

al-Mufīd, it is in al-Ṣadūq that we see this pre-jurisprudential, pre-institutional edifice (if not school) of Imāmī law at its most advanced and thus at its most anomalous. Standing alongside contemporary Sunnī scholars who wrote volumes on jurisprudence,<sup>123</sup> al-Ṣadūq represents this discrepancy between the extant Sunnī and Imāmī literary records at its most striking, and also perhaps its most challenging. As we now turn to his works to examine what we can see of his *ḥadīth* methodology we must remain mindful of this unusual setting, and how it may relate to the thoroughly unusual set of upheavals that shook his community over the course of the century.

### TRADITIONISM – *al-Ṣadūq on Jurisprudence*

In the second half of this chapter we will examine al-Ṣadūq’s writings to see what can be learned regarding his approach to *ḥadīth*. This is not a straightforward task. As discussed, the first extant Imāmī treatise on jurisprudence comes from al-Mufīd, and there neither survives any such treatise from al-Ṣadūq nor any indication that he wrote one. Such comparatively meagre extant oeuvres as survive from his Imāmī contemporaries, meanwhile, are no more forthcoming.

This difficulty is not insurmountable, however, for what we lack in extended confessions of methodology we may try to make up for with such scattered clues as can be gleaned from comments and asides in al-Ṣadūq’s own work and that of his fellows, combined with cautious reference to the earliest bibliographical sources, some of which coming only a few decades after al-Ṣadūq’s death.

As we began the above survey with modern scholarship’s unease with al-Ṣadūq, let us begin this one with that of his contemporaries, foremost among them his student al-Mufīd. Such was al-Mufīd’s discontent with al-Ṣadūq’s views that he authored a ‘correction’ of al-Ṣadūq’s creed (*al-I’tiqādāt*), entitled *Taṣḥīḥ al-i’tiqād bi-ṣawāb al-intiqād*; ‘Correcting Belief with Appropriate Criticism.’ Though both *al-I’tiqādāt*’s contents and al-Mufīd’s criticisms thereof are predominantly theological in nature, during the course of these criticisms al-Mufīd frequently expresses his views of al-Ṣadūq’s approach to text, views that are rarely complimentary. The recurring sentiment of *Taṣḥīḥ* on this subject is that al-Ṣadūq relies on weak *aḥādīth* with inadequate *asānīd*, which he then interprets in an unsophisticated manner,

<sup>123</sup> In terms of extant works, examples include the Ḥanafī Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Jaṣṣāṣ’s (d. 370/985) *al-Fuṣūl fī al-uṣūl*, or the lengthy treatment of jurisprudence (*al-Shar‘īyat*) in the Mu’tazilī ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī’s (d. 415/1024) *al-Mughnī*.

complaints that al-Mufīd usually follows with what he states are more reliable *aḥādīth* on which he reasons an amended doctrine.<sup>124</sup> It is a criticism that found echoes ever since up to modern scholarly characterisations of al-Ṣadūq as traditionist, even primitive in his approach to *aḥādīth*.<sup>125</sup>

Al-Mufīd's critique notwithstanding, it is clear from al-Ṣadūq's works and other sources that he was far from ignorant of the methods of *ḥadīth*-criticism. The early bibliographical evidence is quite unanimous on this point. Both al-Najāshī and al-Ṭūsī provide a detailed record of al-Ṣadūq's extensive oeuvre on the subject of *rijāl*: as well as a commentary on an earlier work of *rijāl* by al-Barqī, al-Ṣadūq is attributed a set of fifteen works concerning respectively the men and women who have narrated material from Muḥammad, those who have narrated from each of first eleven imāms, those who have narrated from Fatima and those who received letters from the twelfth imām.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, while nearly all of his recorded works are enumerated by the bibliographers haphazardly and with purely descriptive titles ('The Book of Marriage,' 'The Book of Pilgrimage' etc.), these books of *rijāl* are listed as a group and referred to by the distinguishing title of 'The Lanterns' (sg. *miṣbāḥ*) suggesting that they held a particular status as notable works. We must allow al-Mufīd his criticisms, but they cannot compel us to deny the fact that al-Ṣadūq was evidently a respected author on the subject of *asānīd* and their contents.

The bibliographers also serve to mollify al-Mufīd's complaints by according al-Ṣadūq unambiguous praise, even though they were his students. Both al-Najāshī and al-Ṭūsī give descriptions of the standing and reliability of the authors they discuss, especially those more famous or more prolific, including any notable failings. It is therefore noteworthy that their comments on al-Ṣadūq are entirely, indeed emphatically positive. Both laud him with such honourifics as 'our master (*shaykhunā*),' 'our scholar (*faqīhunā*),' 'illustrious (*jalīl*)' and so forth, while al-Ṭūsī praises his memory and critical eye for *aḥādīth* and *akhbār* and his perspicuity in matters of *rijāl*.<sup>127</sup> It should be noted that both authors are quite capable of praising an eminent scholar while including caveats. Al-Ṭūsī, for example, praises al-Iskāfī as good (*ḥasan*) author, but openly laments that he subscribed to analogy (*qiyās*).<sup>128</sup> Al-Najāshī similarly heaps praise on the prolific and respected scholar Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd al-Ayyāshī (d. c. 280/900) but notes that he transmits a great deal from weak narrators.<sup>129</sup> That al-Ṣadūq

<sup>124</sup> E.g. al-Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥ*, pp. 27, 30, 32, 34, 39.

<sup>125</sup> See above.

<sup>126</sup> Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 373-375.

<sup>127</sup> Al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, p. 157, al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 372.

<sup>128</sup> Al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, p. 134.

<sup>129</sup> Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 335.

is spared such criticism speaks alongside their eulogies of him to place al-Mufīd's criticism of his teacher's narrations in valuable context.

It is already apparent that a view of al-Ṣadūq off as a naïve, indiscriminate transmitter is quite untenable. We must regret that none of his *rijāl* works survive to be analysed, but his extant compendia do offer glimmers of the expertise that al-Ṭūsī describes. Rare though they are, there are instances in al-Ṣadūq's writing where he gives pronouncements on the *isnād* of a *ḥadīth*. In *Kamāl al-dīn* he notes that the narrator of a *ḥadīth*, Aḥmad b. Hilāl, is condemned (*majrūh*) by his teachers and that using his narrations is forbidden.<sup>130</sup> In *ʿUyūn* he explains of one *ḥadīth* that although his revered teacher Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. al-Walīd distrusted its narrator, he nonetheless recorded this *ḥadīth* in one of his works which al-Ṣadūq read with him, and he gave no sanction against it.<sup>131</sup> In *Maʿānī*, meanwhile, al-Ṣadūq takes the trouble to point out of a particular *ḥadīth* that although he has only heard it from one source and it is not corroborated by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. al-Walīd, he deems it authentic nonetheless, given its support from other reliable material.<sup>132</sup> We also see him discuss concepts related to the analysis of *aḥādīth*. *Kamāl al-dīn* includes lengthy discussion of *tawātur*; the property of a *ḥadīth* of having too many avenues of transmission to be faked.<sup>133</sup> In his *al-Iʿtiqādāt*, meanwhile, he briefly mentions the technical designations of *aḥādīth* as giving general (*mujmal*) or specific injunctions (*mufassar*).<sup>134</sup> Not only are such references witnesses to a clear knowledge of jurisprudential concerns and vocabulary, they also seem to go beyond what Modarressi prescribes as al-Ṣadūq's standpoint on such matters in his capacity as a traditionist. The traditionists, Modarressi states, were only willing to use such jurisprudential concepts as were explicitly outlined in texts of *aḥādīth*.<sup>135</sup> In terms like *mujmal* and *tawātur*, however, al-Ṣadūq is using vocabulary that does not appear in the available corpus of Imāmī *ḥadīth*, and indeed he does not when invoking these terms cite any *aḥādīth* to justify their use.<sup>136</sup>

It is evident that al-Ṣadūq was not only fully conversant in the discourse of *ḥadīth*-criticism but was accorded significant praise for his expertise in this subject by subsequent generations. We are tempted therefore to condemn al-Mufīd at this juncture as deeply unjust in his assault

<sup>130</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 105-6.

<sup>131</sup> *ʿUyūn*, vol. ii, p. 24.

<sup>132</sup> *Maʿānī*, p. 272.

<sup>133</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 31-157.

<sup>134</sup> *Al-Iʿtiqādāt*, p. 117.

<sup>135</sup> Modarressi, *Introduction*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>136</sup> It should be noted that while this is the case here, it has been noted by Madelung with regard to al-Ṣadūq's theology and by Gleave with regard to his legal writing in *al-Faqīh* that his approach is demonstrably shaped by the content of the *ḥadīth* on which he relies. See Madelung, 'Imāmism', p. 17; Gleave, p. 361.

on his teacher. This may be premature, however. Alongside these clear indicators of al-Ṣadūq's expertise in this matter, there also appear in his works a number of features which place him at odds with the approach to *ḥadīth* and authenticity found in other Imāmī writings of the period.

## THE PROBLEM WITH AL-ṢADŪQ

Al-Ṣadūq's occasional comments and al-Mufīd's select criticisms notwithstanding, the vast majority of al-Ṣadūq's *asānīd* stand without any clear marker of what al-Ṣadūq or his contemporaries made of their reliability. Many of al-Ṣadūq's narrators are simply unknown beyond the presence of their names in *asānīd*, and contemporary *rijāl* literature gives us only an extremely partial picture of how different narrators were viewed by the Imāmī scholarly community. There is no systematic comparative study of the *asānīd* of different Imāmī scholars of the fourth/tenth century, and such a study would certainly be a valuable avenue for future research. In the absence of such analysis, meanwhile, there remain a number of observations that can be made of al-Ṣadūq's selection of tradents that can be made on the basis of the available evidence, many of which indicate a willingness to use material judged questionable by others.<sup>137</sup>

One of the early chapters of al-Ṣadūq's *al-Tawḥīd*, 'That [God] has Neither Body nor Form,' is dominated by the figure of the prominent narrator and disciple of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, Hishām b. al-Ḥakam.<sup>138</sup> The chapter features a large group of *ḥadīth* in which the Imām is asked by a disciple about the teaching that God has a body, to which the Imām invariably responds that this is blackest heresy. As often as not, the imām's disciple identifies the propagator of this seditious doctrine that the imām rejects as Hishām b. al-Ḥakam. So frequently do the *aḥādīth* blame Hishām for this heresy that when, later in the chapter, reports do appear which attribute the heresy only to 'a group' or 'someone' the reader is left in little doubt as to who that is. Not

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<sup>137</sup> Important work in this field has been done in Newman, *Formative Period*, and Haider, *Origins*, though neither study quite touches al-Ṣadūq, with Newman studying the *asānīd* of earlier collections (al-Kulaynī and his forbears) and Haider studying *asānīd* with a view to reconstructing events in the second/eighth century rather than the circumstances of later compilers.

<sup>138</sup> A controversial follower of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, Hishām numbers among a handful of his disciples who engaged in theological debates, apparently with some success. This seems to have placed him on potentially thorny ground regarding his relationship to his master. Reports suggest that taking too much theological initiative earned the rebuke of al-Ṣādiq, and his record is further complicated by apparent animosity between him and Mūsā al-Kāzīm, whom he followed only after disappointment with his older brother 'Abd Allāh. What is certain is that he was a prolific narrator, and this unsurprisingly results in a rather ambiguous status among later Imāmī scholars, who are faced both with accounts of his lauded service to the Imāms and his rich body of narrations from them, but also of reports of his censure at their hands. See al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 329-348.

only is Hishām a teacher of falsehoods, but some *aḥādīth* make the more specific accusation that he attributes these teachings to the imāms.<sup>139</sup> Clearly, these *aḥādīth* repeatedly tell the reader, ibn al-Ḥakam is not a source to be trusted.

The reader is therefore liable to be surprised to encounter Hishām appearing, unremarked upon, as a frequent feature of al-Ṣadūq's *asānīd* in the rest of the book, indeed in the very next chapter. Scarcely could there be a more iron-clad reason to distrust a narrator than being condemned by the imām as attributing false teachings to him, yet al-Ṣadūq seems unperturbed, an approach all the more striking in a work much of which is devoted to defending the integrity of the imāms' *aḥādīth*.<sup>140</sup> The case is an isolated one in *al-Tawḥīd*, and indeed the vast majority of its *aḥādīth* are purely theological injunctions which offer no comment on the imāms' disciples. We may suppose that al-Ṣadūq includes the denunciations of Hishām for their valuable theological content (the imām's disavowal of anthropomorphism), and hopes that the reader will take them as such without dwelling on their other contents. Conversely, it is hard to ignore the connotations which this concentrated group of traditions raises, especially given Hishām's near-immediate subsequent appearance as an apparently trusted source, and hard to imagine that al-Ṣadūq would expect his readers to ignore it.

The implications of these condemnations of Hishām are not confined to the pages of *al-Tawḥīd*. Though al-Ṣadūq does not repeat them elsewhere, he has told us that such *aḥādīth* are in circulation and must therefore colour any *ḥadīth* from this narrator with potential suspicion.<sup>141</sup> Al-Ṣadūq is clearly willing to discount such suspicion, as is attested to by Hishām's consistent presence in the *asānīd* of his other compendia, including in *al-Faqīh*, a book not of *aḥādīth* to be consulted and pondered but of al-Ṣadūq's rulings which he tells us in the introduction are his authoritative opinions supported by sources he considers trustworthy.

The glaring contradiction of *al-Tawḥīd*'s juxtaposition is not the only one of its kind,<sup>142</sup> but overall al-Ṣadūq's works are largely silent on the reliability of their sources. Nonetheless, such criticism can meanwhile be found in the writing of one of his Imāmī contemporaries, in the invaluable resource that is *Rijāl al-Kashshī*. An exact contemporary of al-Ṣadūq, Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshī (d. 385/995) leaves us the second extant Imāmī work on *rijāl* after that of al-Barqī. While al-Barqī's earlier text survives only as list of names of the imāms'

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<sup>139</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 104-112.

<sup>140</sup> See below, Chapter III.

<sup>141</sup> This is not to say that there are not other *aḥādīth* in which Hishām is praised by the imāms. See, for instance *al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 132-134.

<sup>142</sup> In *al-Khiṣāl*, for instance, one finds a good few *aḥādīth* narrated from Abū Hurayra, but also *aḥādīth* condemning Abū Hurayra as a falsifier of *aḥādīth*. See *al-Khiṣāl*, p. 218 (h. 263).

companions, al-Kashshī's text is a true book of *rijāl* as later scholars would understand it, not just naming narrators but giving detailed descriptive material concerning their integrity or otherwise.

There is, unfortunately, a catch, one which renders al-Kashshī's work as frustrating as it is useful. This is that the text which survives is not his complete original, rather an abridgement thereof made by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī. As such, the text confronts us with a prodigious unknown in the form of all the material which al-Ṭūsī removed. This robs us of the ability to know for sure what al-Kashshī's verdict was on any given figure. An apparently positive entry could have been stripped of negative reports and vice versa. More generally and more importantly, our capacity to reconstruct al-Kashshī's overall approach to *rijāl* criticism, that is to say how he reached and gave expression to his verdicts on individual transmitters and their reliability is radically curtailed. Al-Ṭūsī's abridgement consists only of narrated material, any words from al-Kashshī himself – if there was any – having been expunged.

Nonetheless, while our ability to attain a clear view of al-Kashshī himself and his enterprise is thus stymied, the work can still be of great use in our evaluation of al-Ṣadūq. Al-Ṭūsī's text is not a commentary but an abridgement, and we can thus remain confident that the material which it does contain, selected as it was by al-Kashshī, was in circulation amongst the Imāmīya in al-Ṣadūq's time. This knowledge is illuminating because so little of what we see in al-Kashshī is to be found in al-Ṣadūq's surviving works. While al-Ṣadūq's surviving comments on narrators' reliability are so scarce (a sizeable portion of the total having already been cited above!), al-Kashshī gives us such information on every page. We straightaway know, more confidently still than we did from our awareness of al-Ṣadūq's lost *rijāl* works, that behind al-Ṣadūq's predominant silence on the subject, his narrators are the foci of a dense literature of evaluation, and each *asānīd* he mutely supplies might have been deeply contentious to some of his contemporaries.

We learn from al-Kashshī that Hishām b. al-Ḥakam was not the only one of al-Ṣadūq's regular sources to be the subject of critical evaluations. Confining ourselves to *al-Faqīh*, the text in which al-Ṣadūq is most explicit in affirming the reliability of his sources, we find two regular narrators, Ḥarīz b. 'Abd Allāh and Hishām b. Sālim, who, while accorded some praise in al-Kashshī's material, also have aspersions cast on their reliability.<sup>143</sup> Another source is al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar, who meets with stinging criticism in al-Kashshī's narrations.<sup>144</sup> A significant and useful control is meanwhile supplied in the fact that the most regularly cited sources in *al-Faqīh*, figures like Zurāra b. A'yan, Muḥammad b. Muslim al-Ṭā'ifī and Abū

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<sup>143</sup> Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 349-352, 447-449.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., pp. 387-394.



Baṣīr, find consistent praise in al-Kashshī.<sup>145</sup> From this we learn that the material we see in the latter clearly overlaps significantly with that informing al-Ṣadūq's own views on matters of *rijāl*, reinforcing our confidence that al-Ṣadūq was well aware of the criticisms levelled at some of his other narrators.

From al-Kashshī we learn that al-Ṣadūq, even at the points where he is most compelled to produce reliable proof-texts; in the defence of the imāms' traditions in *al-Tawhīd*, supporting his own edicts in *al-Faqīh* and affirming the existence and legitimacy of the twelfth imām in *Kamāl al-dīn*, draws on figures like Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, Hishām b. Sālim and al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar in evidence, figures who al-Kashshī shows us the Imāmī scholarly community had reason to distrust. We thus begin to see indicators of the methods to which al-Mufīd finds cause to object.

Interrogating what other scholars made of al-Ṣadūq's *asānīd* must remain for the moment an inexact science. Where we can speak with more confidence is how al-Ṣadūq himself presents the reliability or otherwise of his material, and how this may compare to his contemporaries. A voice to draw upon is another exact contemporary of al-Ṣadūq, ibn Qūlawayh. Ibn Qūlawayh is significantly linked to our discussion by a number of additional factors. His father and teacher was Muḥammad. b. Qūlawayh, who was also a teacher of al-Kashshī. Ibn Qūlawayh, meanwhile, was another teacher of al-Mufīd, indeed his principal teacher of law who enjoys far more regular citation in al-Mufīd's works than al-Ṣadūq, whose appearances are rather exceptional. Ibn Qūlawayh thus constitutes a link between two figures both of whom harboured critical views of the contents of some of al-Ṣadūq's *asānīd*.<sup>146</sup> Regrettably for so significant a figure, ibn Qūlawayh leaves us only one extant work of his own, on the relatively innocuous subject of *ziyāra*. Yet this little-noticed manual of devotion supplies an extremely revealing text. In ibn Qūlawayh's short introduction to his work we read as follows:

I have not included herein any *ḥadīth* narrated from anomalous persons (*al-shadh dhādh min al-rijāl*),<sup>147</sup> narrated as their *aḥādīth* are from those who have been mentioned but who are not among those known for narration, famed for *ḥadīth* and knowledge.<sup>148</sup>

These few lines are a first in the history of Imāmī jurisprudence. Nowhere else in the extant textual record prior to al-Mufīd, not in al-Barqī, al-Kulaynī or al-Ṣadūq, do we find a *ḥadīth*

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., pp. 215-238, 238-245, 245-249.

<sup>146</sup> In the case of al-Kashshī, of course, we only know that he narrated material to this affect.

<sup>147</sup> It is this very criticism of being from anomalous persons (*shawwādh*) that al-Mufīd levels against al-Ṣadūq's proof-texts in *Taṣḥīḥ* (p. 39).

<sup>148</sup> Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, p. 6.

collector who begins his compilation with so detailed a guarantee that the narrations therein are trustworthy, conveyed by reliable sources, sources indeed that are known to have been reliable, rather than anomalous names. What we do see in earlier collections are briefer, more general claims to the authenticity of the contents: al-Qummī (d. ) states in the introduction to his *tafsīr* that what follows is narrated ‘from our masters and those we trust (sg. *thiqa*);’<sup>149</sup> al-Kulaynī himself presents *al-Kāfī* as offering knowledge based on ‘sound traditions from the truthful ones and established *sunan* upon which one can act.’<sup>150</sup>

In all three of these authors these opening assertions of reliability are to be found in their only extant works, none of the three leaving us more than a single book. Al-Ṣadūq, of course, leaves us a great many books, but in contrast to these other compilers we find amongst his eighteen extant compendia only a single instance of such an introductory promise to supply only authentic *aḥādīth*. Moreover, this is in *al-Faqīh*, and comes in the context of al-Ṣadūq justifying his omission of *asānīd* in this work, and, indeed, assuring the reader that the many rulings in *al-Faqīh* for which no proof-text is supplied are based on reliable material.<sup>151</sup> All his other works, meanwhile, with their assembled *aḥādīth* and *asānīd*, are given no such guarantee. Moreover, as we have seen, he is sometimes content to narrate material that he himself has cast aspersions on, as well as *asānīd* with self-evident defects such as gaps or narrators who are not even named.<sup>152</sup> Though by no means a regular occurrence, such features only enhance the contrast with ibn Qūlawayh’s eagerness to guarantee that his every *isnād* and narrator is sound.

This contrast is particularly striking given al-Kulaynī’s and ibn Qūlawayh’s relationship to al-Mufīd. As he criticises al-Ṣadūq’s choice of *ḥadīth* in *Taṣḥīḥ*, al-Mufīd cites al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī* as a preferable, reliable source, according the work some high praise.<sup>153</sup> When al-Mufīd himself narrates from al-Kulaynī, meanwhile, as he does regularly, his source is ibn Qūlawayh. We may thus observe that these scholars whom al-Mufīd deems more reliable than al-Ṣadūq themselves vest more importance in asserting the authenticity of their own material.

Just as al-Ṣadūq seems less anxious to assert the reliability of his compendia’s contents *en masse*, we may also observe an apparent reluctance to invoke questions of authenticity in polemical situations. We have seen how al-Mufīd, if confronted by a tradition narrated by al-Ṣadūq with which he disagrees, dependably responds by declaring the tradition unreliable. Though al-Ṣadūq occasionally adopts a similar approach, as in the examples cited above, he

<sup>149</sup> Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. i, p. 4.

<sup>150</sup> Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. i, p. 8.

<sup>151</sup> *Al-Faqīh*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>152</sup> See also below.

<sup>153</sup> E.g. al-Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥ*, p. 55.

far more regularly deals with troublesome material not by casting doubt on its source but rather by interpreting the text differently.<sup>154</sup>

This evidence suggests a picture of the fourth/tenth-century Imāmī scholars as a community for whom variations in opinion regarding formal standards of authenticity stand alongside variations in the rhetorical import accorded to those standards. Though al-Ṣadūq commands evident, even celebrated technical knowledge in matters of *ḥadīth*-authentication, a picture thus begins to emerge of divisions within the Imāmī community regarding the value of such discourses of authenticity, with al-Ṣadūq appearing as a figure to whom they are of comparatively reduced import, distancing him from the intellectual genealogy to which al-Mufīd accords more esteem.

### AL-I‘TIQĀDĀT

A more developed picture of al-Ṣadūq’s ambiguous attitude to the value of *isnād*-criticism is to be found in his *al-I‘tiqādāt*, the final four chapters of which come as close as al-Ṣadūq ever does to discussions of jurisprudential methodology. This is, in itself, unusual for a creed, a work the first forty-one chapters of which have outlined core theological concerns for the lay believer: predestination, the unity of God, the fate of sinners and so forth. This suddenly changes at the book’s close, and after an unremarkable chapter on the sanctity of the Prophet’s descendants we encounter the following:

The Chapter of Belief Regarding *Akhbār* Which Explain Specifics (*mufasssara*) and Those Making General Pronouncements (*mujmala*): our belief concerning the *ḥadīth* which explains specifics is that it overrules that which makes general pronouncements.

The Chapter of Belief Regarding Prohibition (*ḥaẓr*) and License (*ibāḥa*): our belief concerning this is that all things are permitted (*muṭlaq*) except those for which there exists a prohibition.<sup>155</sup>

The very shortest in the book, these terse pronouncements are pure jurisprudence. Al-Mufīd adds an amendment to the second one (some things are known by the intellect to be wrong even in the absence of revealed prohibition) but leaves the first without criticism, clearly recognising and engaging the brief pronouncements as legal theory. To an extent they

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<sup>154</sup> See, for instance, Chapter III.

<sup>155</sup> *Al-I‘tiqādāt*, p. 117.

constitute another of those glimpses of an unpreserved methodology found across al-Ṣadūq's work, but they are all the more puzzling and frustrating that the others. This is firstly because they are even rarer for touching on an area of jurisprudence concerning not the authenticity of *ahādīth* but the legal consequences of the linguistic technicalities of their text, constituting the only time we see al-Ṣadūq engaging these questions in such terms. Secondly there is the enigma of their presence in *al-I'tiqādāt*, for the discussion of such methodological matters in a creed is, as Fyzee notes, most irregular.<sup>156</sup> The combination of their isolated subject matter and their extreme terseness makes a glaring contrast with the didactic, theological tone of the rest of the work. Wherefore does al-Ṣadūq seek to include unelaborated jurisprudential technicalities as a tenet of faith?

These disembodied fragments of jurisprudence seem to form a prelude to the more involved though rather less conventional discussions of textual proofs in the following two chapters. The penultimate chapter discusses 'Belief Concerning Available Reports About Medicine.'<sup>157</sup> In a fascinating insight into the life of the tenth-century Imāmī community, al-Ṣadūq here supplies a list of reasons why heeding *ahādīth* containing medical advice may be inadvisable for one's health, even though the imām himself is not at fault. The Imām, for example, may have known better than his patient what ailed him, and thus the prescribed cure may fit the real affliction, undisclosed to posterity, not that of which the imām's interlocutor complains. Alternatively, the medical advice supplied may only be valid in Mecca where it was delivered, and thus should be treated with extreme caution by Imāmīs in far off Khurāsān. Thus far we see reasons why a perfectly authentic *ḥadīth* is nonetheless best treated with caution when it comes to medicine.

Another eventuality, meanwhile, is that the *ḥadīth* may not be authentic: al-Ṣadūq lists the scenarios of an absent-minded narrator, a narrator who has memorized only part of the *ḥadīth* and deliberate falsifications spread by the Imāmīya's enemies to discredit them as instances of this. Once again this discourages believers from taking the advice of these texts at face value, and again reassures them in doing so that the imām's infallibility is left unscathed by this need for caution.

This approach is thus far recognisably in keeping with that observed above. Though al-Ṣadūq evokes the reliability of texts as potential grounds for circumspection, he also supplies a set of reasons whereby a perfectly authentic *ḥadīth* may nonetheless be in need of particular interpretation to be understood correctly. Al-Ṣadūq is not content thus to warn his reader, however. He ends the chapter with the clear message that the true medicine of the imāms is to

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<sup>156</sup> Fyzee, p. 157.

<sup>157</sup> *Al-I'tiqādāt*, pp. 118-119.

be found in supplication and the verses of the Qur'ān, ending the chapter with the Prophet's *ḥadīth*: 'God does not cure whomsoever is not cured by "Praise be to God."' Pious expectation can only be superior to the haphazard application of honey and aubergines. Al-Ṣadūq supports this position most uncharacteristically by declaring it to be 'in accordance with what traditions have come to us through strong *asānīd* and authentic channels.'

The concern here is evidently to shape the reader's attitude to a particular sub-corpus of *aḥādīth* and in so doing to control their attitude to the corpus as a whole. Al-Ṣadūq subjects one problematic segment of the corpus to the whole, cautioning the reader against consulting hazardous, unreliable medical *aḥādīth* on the authority of the more reliable texts which counsel cure through recitation and prayer. The medical texts are a threat, discrediting the imāms' reported speech through their questionable content (as al-Ṣadūq's suggestion that they might be forged in a deliberate attempt to discredit the corpus clearly indicates). Al-Ṣadūq's manoeuvres serve to neutralise this threat. Though this chapter shares with the previous two a concern with the application of *aḥādīth*, its tone decisively subjects such technical concerns to the didactic tone of the rest of the book. Al-Ṣadūq touches on the question of forged *aḥādīth*, but the overall goal of the chapter is not to equip readers to critique the *ḥadīth* corpus, but to maintain and encourage their reverence for it.

The final chapter of *al-I'tiqādāt* bears the promising title 'Belief Concerning Two Conflicting *Aḥādīth*.' This, it seems will get to the heart of the matter, purporting to settle for the reader this most fundamental problem of jurisprudence. For the researcher of tenth-century Imāmī jurisprudence such a text is an exciting prospect indeed. Such expectations are to be frustrated however. Al-Ṣadūq begins the chapter thus:

Concerning the authentic narrations of the imāms, our belief is that they are in concordance with the Book of God, blessed and exalted, coherent in their meanings without contradiction, for they come from the conduit of revelation from God, and were they from other than God they would contradict. Thus the apparent meanings of *akhbār* do not contradict except for a number of reasons.<sup>158</sup>

Al-Ṣadūq has already dashed our hopes in the first line: he is only talking about authentic *aḥādīth* that may seem to disagree. How problems of authenticity are to be dealt with, let alone how they might impinge on this problem of contradicting texts, is not up for discussion. The primary reason he gives for why authentic *akhbār* may seem contradictory once again hinges on interpretation of the texts rather than their provenance. Al-Ṣadūq gives the example of three texts which on the face of it prescribe three different ways to expiate the sin of *ẓihār* (a Arab

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<sup>158</sup> *Al-I'tiqādāt*, p. 120.

divorce custom outlawed by Muḥammad): freeing a slave, fasting for two consecutive months and feeding sixty destitute persons. He explains that fasting is prescribed for those with no slaves to free, and the feeding of the destitute for those who are also unable to fast (for example due to illness). Correct understanding thus dissolves the conflict without any need to question the imāms' consistent infallibility. A second, more briefly expounded but nonetheless significant given reason for conflicting reports is the possibility that some *aḥādīth* of the imām were uttered while the imām was in a state of *taqīya*: giving false information to conceal his true identity.<sup>159</sup> Such a *ḥadīth*, of course, is not legally binding, but nor does its existence render the imāms' words any less sacrosanct. (How one tells whether or not a *ḥadīth* was spoken in *taqīya* is not a question al-Ṣadūq discusses here.)

This is not an hermeneutic methodology, rather it is a continuation of the didactic project of the previous chapter. Al-Ṣadūq is not helping his reader to judge the corpus' authenticity, let alone explaining how he himself does so, indeed he is discouraging them from engaging with such questions. This chapter is a defence of the imāms' infallibility and of its continuation in reported text, reassuring the reader of the perfect validity of the imāms' *akhbār*, showing them how what seems contradictory to the untrained eye may be reconciled with the scholar's expertise. The chapter is framed not in jurisprudential but theological terms, anchoring the imāms' speech in the fabric of revelation.

This balanced of priorities is underscored in the long *ḥadīth* that makes up the greater part of the chapter.<sup>160</sup> This is a *ḥadīth* from 'Alī, in which the imām responds to his disciple Sulaym b. Qays who is perturbed by the discrepancy between what he has heard the imām attribute to the Prophet and what he hears attributed to him by the masses. 'Alī roundly condemns the community at large, who attribute falsehoods to God's prophet and sacrilegiously interpret the Qur'ān's myriad complexities with their own baseless opinions.

He continues his instruction of Sulaym with an ubiquitous feature of the literature of *ḥadīth* criticism: the taxonomy of narrators. Just as we see in texts from al-Shāfi'ī's *Risāla* to Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* to al-Jaṣṣāṣ to al-Mufīd, 'Alī lays out the different kinds of people who narrate *aḥādīth* and the different qualities and defects that affect their reliability. There is the hypocrite who lies, the sincere narrator who nonetheless errs by fault of memory and the one whose memory does not fail but who is ignorant of technicalities such as whether the Prophet's recollected command may have been abrogated. He ends the list with its essential component, the narrator who is free of all these faults, and can thus be trusted to transmit the Prophet's

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-121.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., pp. 121-125.

words accurately. Were it not for such individuals, of course, the *ḥadīth* corpus would be unworkable.

Once again we come tantalisingly close to a discussion of *isnād*-criticism, and once again al-Ṣadūq has other plans. ‘Alī follows his taxonomy of narrators with a long speech in which he emphatically and identifies the fourth type of narrator perfect and reliable, exclusively with himself. He alone attended on Muḥammad every night, questioning him on every aspect of his teachings, writing them down and committing them all to memory. The only people allowed in the room during this unique instruction were Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. At the end of every session the Prophet would place his hands on ‘Alī’s breast and pray that his memory be infallible. He informed ‘Alī that God himself had assured him that ‘Alī’s memory would not fail, nor would those of the imāms who would come after him.

This is not a text that discusses how to evaluate the narrators of the imāms’ *ḥadīth*. Rather it is a text that again reinforces the status of those *aḥādīth* as the sovereign source of knowledge, the imām’s supremacy as the perfect narrator, the infallible conduit of the Prophet’s knowledge. Just as in the chapter’s opening and the previous chapter, al-Ṣadūq is suppressing questions of authenticity in favour of compelling reverence to the corpus as a whole.

The fact that this *ḥadīth* clearly does not address the task of the fourth/tenth-century *ḥadīth* scholar does not escape the notice of al-Mufīd, who finds much to criticise in this element of the chapter. He laments precisely al-Ṣadūq’s failure to discuss how one discerns authentic *aḥādīth* from false, how one discerns texts on which one must act from those on which one must not. Sporting as it does such gaping lacunae, he declares, al-Ṣadūq’s treatment of the topic is valueless. He first directs the reader to his other works wherein he discusses the problem in depth, but nonetheless then affixes a discussion of the topic as long as any in *Taṣṣīḥ*, clearly unable to conclude whilst leaving the matter so lamentably undiscussed as al-Ṣadūq has done. As if to assert his point, he finishes by noting that al-Ṣadūq’s *ḥadīth* of ‘Alī and Sulaym is from untrusted sources and is for the most part impermissible to act upon.<sup>161</sup> For his part, al-Ṣadūq makes conspicuous efforts to affirm the truth of the story. While *al-I’tiqādāt*’s proof-texts are usually single reports supplied without *isnād*, at the end of this *ḥadīth* al-Ṣadūq includes numerous corroborating stories of how Sulaym and those who heard the *ḥadīth* from him subsequently met later imāms, who confirmed that they continue to transmit Muḥammad’s knowledge perfectly as God promised they would.

We may recall that Modarressi classifies al-Ṣadūq as belonging to a group of scholars for whom jurisprudential concepts and methods were only permissible to the extent that they were

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<sup>161</sup> Al-Mufīd, *Taṣṣīḥ*, pp. 123-126.

outlined in *aḥādīth*. Such a hypothesis could be offered to explain why al-Ṣadūq allows his discussion an apparently jurisprudential problem to be dominated by a *ḥadīth*, a *ḥadīth* that falls short of what others consider adequate treatment of the topic. Not only is such an explanation undermined by our having already noted that al-Ṣadūq is not so restricted (as illustrated by passages elsewhere in *al-I'tiqādāt*), it is also the case that we see in other authors *aḥādīth* in which problems of conflicting *aḥādīth* are discussed more thoroughly. Al-Kulaynī includes a chapter on precisely this issue in *al-Kāfī*, which includes this same *ḥadīth* of 'Alī and Sulaym but also a number of others. Most commonly these counsel the referring of dubious texts to the Qur'ān or established practice, but other solutions are offered, such as the claim that of two *aḥādīth* the one more recently uttered is binding.<sup>162</sup> One of al-Kulaynī's texts in particular offers a detailed procedure for solving textual contradictions: if a believer is in need of a ruling, the first step is to find and consult someone who narrates the imāms' *ḥadīth*, but this is soon complicated by the possibility that one may meet two such narrators who offer different solutions. In such cases one should follow the most just, the wisest and the most trustworthy, but if no distinction is to be found on those grounds then one follows the narrator whose answer is more in agreement with the generally agreed observed practice of the imām's followers, avoiding suggestions that touch on obscure territory where such consensus is not found. Failing this, one should adhere to whichever report agrees more with the Qur'ān and the Prophet's *sunna* and which, meanwhile, is less in agreement with the practice of the general populace, that is to say non-Imāmīs.<sup>163</sup>

Al-Kulaynī is clearly able to supply his reader with a substantial, entirely *ḥadīth*-based body of material to solve such problems as they may encounter in the *ḥadīth* corpus. In particular it should be noted that this *ḥadīth* and several others entertain and offer solutions to the problem of unreliably narrated *aḥādīth*. It is debatable to what extent al-Kulaynī is presenting any one of his several texts as the definitive solution,<sup>164</sup> but it is meanwhile quite plain that al-Ṣadūq, as he addresses the reader *in propria persona*, gives a discussion of conflicting *ḥadīth* that is far more restricted than what the available *aḥādīth* themselves potentially advocate. Even as he elsewhere departs from the vocabulary attested *ḥadīth* in discussing methodological questions, here for his own reasons he prefers the *ḥadīth*'s uncomplicated affirmation of the imām's superiority to such complex, narrator-focussed approaches as al-Mufīd demands.

In this concluding excursus of *al-I'tiqādāt* we thus see elaborated the divergence of approach between al-Ṣadūq and al-Mufīd, and thus we may assume between broader intellectual trends

<sup>162</sup> Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. i, pp. 107-112.

<sup>163</sup> Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. i, pp. 67-68.

<sup>164</sup> Bayhom Daou ('Imāmī Shī'ī Conception', pp. 194-209) supplies an interesting attempt to extract the details of al-Kulaynī's attitude to *aḥādīth* and other sources of law from this section of *al-Kāfī*.



amongst the Imāmīya at this time. Al-Ṣadūq and al-Mufīd no doubt had their differences over what certifies a text's authenticity, but both were conversant in the same language of jurisprudence and *isnād* criticism. Rather what divides them is a crucial point of rhetoric and emphasis. In al-Mufīd and ibn Qūlawayh we see the urge to draw on *isnād*-critical models of textual authenticity as a central means of affirming the validity of the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus. Al-Ṣadūq, meanwhile, sees such matters as the business of the *faqīh* but counterproductive to invoke before a lay audience. He does not see fit to pledge the soundness of his *asānīd* to the reader as ibn Qūlawayh does, rather his concern is to valorise the perfect soteriological value of the imāms' words, an exercise that is not improved by reminding the reader of the perils of transmission. *Al-I'tiqādāt*, after all, is a creed, and the at first anomalous presence of methodological discussions therein now reveal themselves as anything but, rather the suppressing of such discussions beneath articles of faith. Traditionism here is not an ignorance of *isnād* criticism, rather it is active, reasoned opposition to it.<sup>165</sup>

An essential background what we have seen of al-Ṣadūq's approach to *ḥadīth* is to be found in the only surviving work of his father Ibn Bābawayh the Elder, a text entitled *al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*, 'The Imāmate and Insight that Delivers from Confusion.'. This small, apparently incomplete text contains the earliest extant Imāmī discussion the problems of *ḥadīth* criticism, a text that provides fascinating insight into the balance between soteriology and authenticity we see negotiated in al-Ṣadūq's work. *Al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣira* is a work seeking to reassure the Imāmī faithful with regard to the new circumstance of occultation and to dispel the confusion (*ḥayra*) that besets the community. An integral part of this confusion is, Ibn Bābawayh the Elder notes, the profusion of conflicting narrations from and about the imāms, and the greater part of the book's introduction is his discussion of this particular problem.<sup>166</sup>

This discussion revolves around *taqīya*. Like al-Ṣadūq in *al-I'tiqādāt*, ibn Bābawayh the Elder explains that it is due to *taqīya*, the need for dissimulation, that the imāms uttered contradictory statements, thus to the contemporary menace of conflicting *aḥādīth*.<sup>167</sup> What distinguishes ibn Bābawayh the Elder is his driving assertion that this *taqīya* is utterly, existentially necessary. It is necessary not merely in the sense that the imām is compelled to hide for fear of persecution, rather hiddenness and the withholding of information is an indispensable part of God's benevolent guidance of humanity. Taking the example of the day of judgement, he

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<sup>165</sup> This is an interesting amendment to Gleave (p. 374), who states that al-Ṣadūq was aware of *isnād*-related discussions but did not consider them important. Here we see that al-Ṣadūq's distance from *isnād*-criticism is motivated not merely by disinterest but by animosity!

<sup>166</sup> Ibn Bābawayh the Elder, *al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣira*, pp. 7-9.

<sup>167</sup> Ibn Bābawayh the Elder, *al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣira*, pp. 9-11.

observes that Prophets and Imams alike have always asserted that the end times are near, thus motivating their followers towards righteousness, and yet, infallible as they were, they knew that in fact it would not occur for centuries. Similarly, Jesus could not tell his disciples that in a few hundred years the *sharī'a* which he preached would be abrogated by that of Muḥammad, as this would doubtless deflate their enthusiasm somewhat! Moving to the present, Ibn Bābawayh the Elder explains that the time of the Twelfth Imām's reappearance is concealed for the believers' own good. Were they to be told, for example, that it was centuries hence, they would inevitably become despondent, whilst this withholding of knowledge leaves them in a constant state of hopeful expectation.<sup>168</sup>

Ibn Bābawayh the Elder is particularly concerned to assert this necessary *taqīya* as an alternative and a rebuttal to *badā'*; the concept that God can change his mind, and thus that the imāms, though they are privy to God's secrets, can be surprised.<sup>169</sup> The crux of this concern is the occultation of the Twelfth Imām: this must not be conceived of as a change of the divine plan, rather it was preordained at the dawn of creation, and not only the previous imāms but the previous prophets back to Adam knew that the Twelfth Imām was the last imām and would enter occultation before returning as the *qā'im*. The obstacle to this model of absolute foreknowledge is a body of *aḥādīth* in which the imāms indicate that this was not always the plan. Ibn Bābawayh the Elder cites a well-known *ḥadīth* of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq which seems to ascribe the death of his son and successor designate Ismā'īl to such a divine prevarication, forcefully refuting on the basis of other *aḥādīth* that such a thing is possible, since the names of the imāms have been known since time began. Rather al-Ṣādiq is concealing the truth that he knows.<sup>170</sup> Ibn Bābawayh the Elder cites other reports in which Mūsā al-Kāẓim states that he will not die until he had restored justice to the world, only to subsequently concede in the face of adversity and imprisonment that this may not occur, again attributing the change to God. Ibn Bābawayh the Elder explains that this was a white lie intended to give hope to faithful in those dark times, just as Muḥammad's deceptive forewarning of the imminence of Judgement Day was to impart a sense of urgency, affirming again that the literal truth of the imām's words is theologically impossible.<sup>171</sup>

While other examples are given in this sustained and well-reasoned polemic, the significance of these two is their centrality to momentous schisms within the Imāmīya. The first, of course, pertains to the Ismā'īliya's following of the Ismā'īl b. Ja'far and his descendants instead of Mūsā, while the second concerns the most prominent group of the Wāqifiya who claimed that

<sup>168</sup> Ibn Bābawayh the Elder, *al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣira*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>169</sup> See below.

<sup>170</sup> Ibn Bābawayh the Elder, *al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣira*, pp. 11-17.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 15.

Mūsā was the last imām who remained alive in occultation until his return as the *qā'im*. Ibn Bābawayh the Elder's treatment of these *aḥādīth* is striking because he never questions their authenticity. The *ḥadīth* of al-Ṣādiq concerning Ismā'īl did subsequently retain acceptance in Duodeciman circles, the potential ambiguity of its wording and the resultant theological conundrum continuing to draw interest, but for an Duodeciman to accept that Mūsā al-Kāẓim did effectively declare himself to be the *qā'im* is most unusual! Ibn Bābawayh the Elder's extraordinarily bold approach is to admit in the face of textual diversity that the imāms did utter the *aḥādīth* that contradict his own beliefs and on which his opponents base their teachings, but that they did not mean what they said, emulating the divine precedent of secrecy that is, as he argues, essential to the process of revelation. This is made all the more interesting that he presents this in opposition to the alternative solution of *badā'*. It is apparent from his examples that other Imāmīs are explaining away contradictory *aḥādīth* of the imāms, even apparent rescinded claims to messiahship, as resulting from God's changes of heart. This work thus reveals a context of multiple Imāmī strategies for explaining conflicts in the textual record, approaches that are united by their circumvention of the problem of unreliable narrators.

This provides invaluable context for what we have seen of al-Ṣadūq's approach to authenticity. For ibn Bābawayh the Elder reliability of transmission is emphatically excluded from the discussion of *aḥādīth*, even when that exclusion necessitates such severe compromises as authenticating core legitimating texts of the Wāqifiya. The battle over the *ḥadīth* corpus is fought not through *isnād*-criticism but theology, by negotiating not with human failings but with divine imperatives. al-Ṣadūq's scholarly influence from his father was vast, as is represented by the countless *aḥādīth* that al-Ṣadūq narrates on his authority. In his own surviving work on occultation, *Kamāl al-dīn*, we see the imprint of ibn Bābawayh the Elder's formulations. Al-Ṣadūq embraces his father's concept of the existential necessity of hiddenness as he expounds the reason and wisdom of the occultation. He supplies the example of God's commanding the angels to bow before Adam, the command that the Devil fatally refused. God, he reminds the reader, did not, as he could have done, explain to the angels why Adam was worthy of their prostrate reverence. Instead his command was issued whilst maintaining their state of ignorance, ignorance that allowed them the virtue of faithful obedience (even as it allowed the Devil to reach his own conclusions).<sup>172</sup> The analogy with God's current concealment of his imām is no less useful to al-Ṣadūq than it was to his father. Unlike *al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣira*, however, *Kamāl al-dīn* also engages with question of authenticity and transmission. When it comes to refuting the Wāqifiya's claims about al-

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<sup>172</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 43-45.

Kāzim he does not entertain *aḥādīth* that support them, rather focussing on amassing testimonies of al-Kāzim's death and so refuting any notion that he lives on in occultation. He uses an ingenious variety of mechanisms to assert the truth of the Twelfth Imām and his occultation, and amongst these is the retort to his opponents that their proof-texts are not as reliable as his.<sup>173</sup>

We thus see in al-Ṣadūq's use of discourses of authenticity a qualified emendation and hybridisation of his father's position. The latter's radical decision to negotiate the problem of textual difference entirely through theology dropped in favour of al-Ṣadūq's sporadic but effective recourse to the strength or otherwise of *aḥādīth*'s transmission. Nonetheless, theological approaches to the problem still retain a substantial presence in al-Ṣadūq's writings. Though less uncompromising, his discussion of conflicting *aḥādīth* in *al-I'tiqādāt*, excluding questions of *rijāl* and *isnād*-criticism in favour of emphasising the corpus' unique sanctity, presents a pronounced echo of ibn Bābawayh the Elder's approach. It is an echo that is perceptible across his oeuvre and its reception, in others' denigrations of his standards of criticism and his own reluctance to invoke authenticity either as a source of legitimacy or as a polemical tool.

Examination of these few surviving discussions of *ḥadīth* criticism from the fourth/tenth century prompts us to suggest some revisions to Modarressi's taxonomy of traditionists and intermediates. He groups al-Ṣadūq and al-Kulaynī as traditionists, while ibn Qūlawayh and ibn Bābawayh the Elder are together classed as intermediaries. The latter are distinguished from the traditionists on the basis of their following the practice of *ijtihād*, even though they lacked the systematic jurisprudence offered by the rationalists.<sup>174</sup> We have not encountered much of the above to dispute Modarressi's taxonomy on these grounds. Whether or not and how *ijtihād* was practiced by all four of these authors remains a topic that would require a great deal of further research, not least since two of them leave no surviving legal works. Nonetheless, there are a number of points that the preceding examination has raised which renders Modarressi's brief schema an incomplete picture of the relationships between these scholars and the intellectual trends they represent.

*Ijtihād* notwithstanding, we have seen aspects of these scholars' writings on *ḥadīth* criticism that complicate Modarressi's picture. We have already observed that al-Ṣadūq does not seem to fit the mould of the traditionists as described, drawing on a conceptual framework beyond the letter of the *ḥadīth*. On the other hand, we have also seen that al-Kulaynī appears to draw from the letter of the *ḥadīth* a critical approach that appears, at least in some aspects, more

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., pp. 67-69 and passim. See below, Chapter IV.

<sup>174</sup> Modarressi, *Introduction*, pp. 32-29.

sophisticated than what we see in al-Ṣadūq. What we have seen of ibn Bābawayh the Elder, meanwhile, shows a scholar who offers an ingenious dialectic solution to textual difficulties that goes quite beyond what may be found in any *ḥadīth*, but who is meanwhile apparently unwilling to entertain any *isnād*-criticism, even as al-Kulaynī narrates *aḥādīth* that advocate it. The relative sophistication of these approaches and the extent to which their authors would have credited them to independent reason as opposed to text cannot be judged with much certainty from the available texts, however a clear dividing line seems to be the authors' willingness or otherwise to adopt *isnād*-criticism in their discussions of conflicting *aḥādīth*. Al-Kulaynī is, though as far as we can see only within such limits as expounded in the *aḥādīth* themselves. Ibn Qūlawayh, meanwhile, has no such reservations. Ibn Bābawayh the Elder gives no sign of entertaining such discussions, a position that his son al-Ṣadūq partially follows, acknowledging questions of forgery and reliability but keeping the focus on his father's preferred mechanisms of interpretation and soteriological affirmation.

This draws attention to another difference with Modarressi's model, which cuts across teacher-student relationships. In his schema, al-Kulaynī is a traditionist but his student is an intermediate, as is ibn Bābawayh the Elder though his son remains a traditionist. What we have rather observed here is how these relationships are valuable in grouping our scholars. The two ibn Bābawayhs have a distinct approach that is quite different from that of al-Kulaynī and his student ibn Qūlawayh, while in both pairs we see a distinct development between teacher and student, both al-Ṣadūq and ibn Qūlawayh exhibiting methods that are more open to developed jurisprudential concepts than their masters.

We recall Melchert's verdict that it is the traditionalist-rationalist spectrum that is the most effective tool in reckoning the differences between schools of thought in this period, one that Modarressi's taxonomy seems to pre-empt. In the schema offered here, however, it is suggested that this is only one of two axes along which these scholars are to be differentiated. In terms of the role of reason, it appears that this increases with the passage of time, such that both of the younger scholars are more amenable to jurisprudence than their teachers, a conclusion that Gleave's evidence seems to support.<sup>175</sup> A second point of contention, meanwhile, is the extent to which discussions of *isnād*-criticism are allowed to impinge on theological explanations of textual diversity. This difference remains a sharp division between scholars who are contemporaries, and approaches are seen to be maintained across two

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<sup>175</sup> Gleave, pp. 352, 360-361, 381-382.

generations, indicating that this was a sustained disagreement between rival groups of scholars.<sup>176</sup>

### THE GHOST OF THE IMĀM – *Jurisprudence and Occultation*

What remains to be explored are the reasons why al-Ṣadūq and his father adhered to this peculiar animosity to *isnād*-criticism. As we have seen, this is a separate question from the scholars' view of the role of reason, and therefore cannot be explained by the simple, familiar sentiment that human reason should not be allowed to distort what God has revealed in text. Moreover, that age-old dispute between reason and revelation is a constant presence throughout the history of the Imāmīya, as it is in other Muslim traditions, whereas these particular attitudes to *isnād*-criticism, not to mention the eccentric hermeneutics of *taqīya* of ibn Bābawayh the Elder, do not seem to outlive the fourth-tenth century, and the wholesale embrace of jurisprudential literature after al-Mufīd. It thus appears to be quite a different kind of problem.

Returning to ibn Bābawayh the Elder, we recall that his lionisation of *taqīya* is embedded in a work on occultation. All this obscure confusion of texts and interpretations, ibn Bābawayh the Elder says, is ultimately part of that greater obfuscation of the truth that is the concealment of the imām.<sup>177</sup> Just as the imām's cosmic role as *ḥujja* is the reason why his understanding of the Qur'ān and his recollection of the Prophet's *sunna* are uniquely perfect, so the difficulty in accessing that sacred imāmī knowledge is part of the same divine plan of revelation that puts the imām on earth in the first place. We have above referred to ibn Bābawayh the Elder's approach as subjecting textual problems to theology, but in fact it subjects them to imāmology.

Why this is important and, indeed, entirely reasonable is that the Imāmī doctrine of the imāmate has a relationship with the problem of textual contradictions that precedes the occultation. This is the very relationship that is encapsulated in the *ḥadīth* of 'Alī and Sulaym cited by al-Ṣadūq in *al-I'tiqādāt*. The imām in this *ḥadīth* is the solution to conflicting *aḥādīth* and dishonest narrators. The last prophet is succeeded by *ḥujja* after *ḥujja* so humanity need not rely on so frail a thing as memory to access God's final message to his creation.

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<sup>176</sup> It is worth noting that Haider has (much more extensively) demonstrated a similar phenomenon with regard to the Jārūdī and Baṭrī Zaydīs. Haider shows that two groups that doxographical literature describes as contemporary, opposed positions were actually different stages in a linear development. See Haider, *Origins*, p. 192 and *passim*.

<sup>177</sup> Ibn Bābawayh the Elder, *al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣira*, pp. 9-11.

Al-Ṣadūq, of course, narrates this *ḥadīth* decades after the occultation, but it voices a basic doctrine that is a staple of the Imāmīya since perhaps the eighth century, and indeed may have been their central point of contention with other groups, Shīʿī and otherwise. Though the imāms were surrounded by disciples and narrators, and were certainly aware of the potential problems of their words being misrepresented to distant followers (claims of their divinity being the most obvious such hazard), this doctrine of the imām as the single perfect conduit, who renders laughable other groups' attempts to reconstruct God's will with faulty recollections and fallible reasoning, was certainly in evidence amongst their followers. So, too, was the closely related belief that it was impossible for the world to be without such a *ḥujja*, since by no other means could accurate preservation of Muḥammad's true teachings be assured. The imām is thus the solution to the Prophet's absence long before the notion of the imām's absence is conceivable.<sup>178</sup>

This is not the moment to begin piecing together how the extraordinary negotiation of the occultation, whereby the imām who must be present was rendered effectively absent, was achieved by the Imāmī elites. What matters is that decades later al-Ṣadūq is still drawing upon models of the imām's authority that date from before that process.<sup>179</sup> His *ḥadīth* presents the imām as a solution to the difficulties of textual transmission at a time when the imām has himself become the subject of such problems. If the imām is needed to transmit from the Prophet, who is then to transmit from the imām? Compared to 'Alī's inspired, divinely guaranteed transmission from Muḥammad, al-Ṣadūq efforts to transmit the imāms' *ḥadīth* risks looking catastrophically inadequate by comparison. Such is the dilemma unleashed by the occultation. The Hidden Imām appears as an epistemological ghost at the feast, speaking of an ideal of knowledge-transmission to which compilers can never attain but whose absolute demands they are compelled to reaffirm.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Studies of early Shīʿī theology and imāmology are many and varied, including about the axis of the extent to which the material in *ḥadīth* compendia like those of al-Barqī and al-Kulaynī represent the views of earlier Shīʿīs. Amir-Moezzi (*Divine Guide*; 'Remarques') and Lalani both take a thoroughly positivist approach, treating these later sources as fundamentally reliable portrayals of the second/eighth-century imāms' teachings, thus situating the belief in the necessity of the imām's presence in a solidly second/eighth-century pedigree if not even older. Even amongst studies that take a more critical approach to the sources, however, such as Kohlberg (*Imāmiyya*) there is a broad consensus that the belief in the imām's indispensable presence dates from before the turn of the third/ninth century.

<sup>179</sup> For discussions of the transition from visible to hidden imām see Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 3-105; Hayes; Arjomand, 'Crisis'; 'Imam Absconditus'; 'Consolation'. All three authors' analyses show the transition to have been a gradual one, the network of scholars and financial agents around the imām wielding steadily increasing authority in comparison to their ostensive master the imām (who on two occasions was an infant).

<sup>180</sup> It is worthy of note in this regard that nowhere in the extant literature of this period does an Imāmī compiler make what would appear to be the single greatest claim to authority for a book of *ḥadīth* in the period of occultation: that the Imām is hidden, and therefore only accessible by means of his recollected *ḥadīth*. Rather we see again and again books introduced by the sentiment that the imāms'

It is to this dilemma, then, that we see al-Ṣadūq and his father responding to in their idiosyncratic approach to the *ḥadīth* corpus and its foibles. In their reluctance to discuss questions of how material is transmitted from the imām they are showing deference to older epistemology of revelation, abundantly voiced in the *aḥādīth* they compile, in which the imām should be the solution to such problems rather than their subject. Though the new status quo of the occultation has irrevocably changed this, the ideological about turn that acknowledging that change threatens to be is still an intimidating prospect in the first century after al-‘Askarī’s death. Instead we see in ibn Bābawayh the Elder the extraordinary impulse to continue the imām’s status as a theologically justified panacea to issues of transmission, the imām’s very absence and the resultant uncertainty being no less a part of God’s plan than the infallible guidance he supplied when present. Writing a generation later, such an absolute solution no longer seems tenable for al-Ṣadūq. Whether this is due to the ever lengthening occultation (including the inset of the greater occultation) or to the increasing suzerainty of a model of jurisprudence in which *isnād*-criticism was paramount is not easy to say, but it was almost certainly a combination of the two. What we therefore see in his writings is a distinctive compromise. He acknowledges and makes use of *isnād*-criticism, but in a way which, in comparison to other scholars, is understated. Acknowledging the possibility of forgery can be of use, but it is subservient to the higher objective of defending the sanctity of the corpus of the imāms’ traditions. This same objective dictates that where possible the integrity and infallibility of all *aḥādīth* should be affirmed, their diversity explained by interpretation rather than by selective authentication. The text of the imām’s reported speech should be unconditionally revered even as the imām himself, whom it must now represent and whose function it must fulfil; as inspired and unimpeachable, as mysterious and inscrutable.<sup>181</sup>

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knowledge is the way to salvation and deliverance from bewildering disagreement (e.g. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. i, pp. 5-9, al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir*, pp. 8-23, al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. i, pp. 1-29), sometimes along with a brief assertion that the book’s transmitted *aḥādīth* are sound. Nowhere do authors evoke the obvious truth that it the period of occultation *aḥādīth* are now of the utmost importance as only by them can the imāms’ knowledge be accessed. This may be because the onset of this reality was a gradual one (*ḥadīth* had, after all, been transmitted during the imāms’ lifetimes), but in light of what is explored here it seems likely that the uncomfortable nature of this truth also contributed to its remaining unexpressed.

<sup>181</sup> Melchert makes an interesting observation of the Imāmī ‘Semi-Rationalists’ as he calls them (in which he includes al-Ṣadūq), that they are eager to label themselves as traditionist but in practice they are quite willing to argue. This is certainly the case with al-Ṣadūq, who gives unflinchingly stark injunctions about the forbidden nature of dialectic and argumentation (*al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 497-504; *al-I’tiqādāt*, pp. 49-50), but is can be found reasoning at length in polemical contexts (*Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 31-157). This would be well explained by what is hypothesised here of Imāmīs who were ideologically compelled to uphold a vision of the imāms’ reported words as the sovereign authority, even as the imām himself used to be, while being practically compelled to defend and support those words with textual criticism and reasoned argument. See Melchert, *Imāmīs*, p. 247.



## CONCLUSION

Al-Ṣadūq's understanding of the problems of *ḥadīth* criticism is quite unique in the extant textual record, and uniquely representative of the age of momentous changes through which he lived. We see in his writings the increasing presence of jurisprudential language, a presence which would only increase and solidify into complete methodologies and manuals in later Buwayhid scholars. Alongside this discourse, meanwhile, we encounter a quite different, retrospective approach to the texts, one which seeks to uphold their indispensable theological status in the face of the ongoing trauma of the imām's absence. If established scholarly frameworks for studying the Imāmīya in the fourth/tenth century have tended to leave al-Ṣadūq falling through the gaps, this is because his works bear witness to a brilliant, though short-lived, system of thought that saw the Imāmīya through the extraordinary transition from present imāmate to Hidden Imām, distinct both from those of the third/ninth century and those of the fifth/tenth,<sup>182</sup> and quite unlike those of his contemporaries among other, non-Imāmī groups.<sup>183</sup>

As he draws attention to the importance of jurisprudence in understanding the history of Imāmī Shī'ism, Stewart attributes the neglect of this area to an abiding assumption that the essence of Imāmī thought is imāmology, with the result that it has been on imāmology that studies of the Imāmīya have focussed, alongside theology of which it is considered part.<sup>184</sup> What the above shows us is that while Stewart is not to be faulted in his drawing attention to the significance of jurisprudence, in the fourth/tenth century jurisprudence and imāmology are not easily separated. Rather what we see in al-Ṣadūq and in this crucial transitional period of which he is our most valuable representative is a system of thought in which methodological concerns about the approach to and analysis of proof-texts are inextricably bound to the conceptualisations of the imām's authority, and how that authority is to be made effective in the new epistemological world of occultation.

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<sup>182</sup> It is interesting that Newman has documented a conspicuous decline in interest in al-Ṣadūq's works among Imāmīs after the Buwayhid period. See Newman, 'Recovery', pp. 112-115.

<sup>183</sup> There is a comparison to be made between al-Ṣadūq's activities and those Sunnīs in the early ninth century. Figures like al-Shāfi'ī and ibn Qutayba were then engaged in a similar endeavour to justify the *ḥadīth* corpus as a valid, indeed essential source of authority in the face of the text-shy rationalism that had characterised earlier decades. Unlike later disputes between traditionists and rationalists and like al-Ṣadūq, these thinkers were justifying *ḥadīth* on an existential level, against voices who would deny it any substantial validity. Of course, beyond these similarities the oppositions faced by al-Ṣadūq and these Sunnīs, and thus the ways in which they were compelled to justify their respective corpora, were very different. Though al-Shāfi'ī and ibn Qutayba had to defend the sanctity of *ḥadīth*, they also had to demonstrate that it could be technically viable, leading to a proliferation of *isnād*-critical discussion alongside lionisations of the importance of the Prophet's speech. See Musa, pp. 31-80.

<sup>184</sup> Stewart, *Orthodoxy*, pp. 6, 13-14.

This was not a status quo that outlasted the Buwayhid period. For subsequent generations of Imāmīs the occultation of the imām became a purely theological problem, quite distinct from the practicalities of jurisprudential hermeneutics. For al-Ṣadūq, at the close of the first century after the occultation,<sup>185</sup> this theological problem still looms as a fundamental epistemological catastrophe that threatens to undermine the whole edifice of textual authority. The Imāmīya moved inexorably towards what has become the utterly familiar ‘great synthesis’ of reasoned deduction controlled by revealed authority routinized in text, but a lingering ideal of a present imām still deemed this intolerable. The era of the imām’s immanence still harried the fringes of living memory, taunting those who sought to construct authority through texts and recollections with the lost promise of authority right here right now, authority that does not need to be remembered because it has never gone away. As Buwayhid rule inaugurated a newly cosmopolitan intellectual environment, al-Ṣadūq had to walk the tightrope between appeasing ever more demanding orthodoxies of authenticity whilst protecting the speech of the imām from the still unbearable compromise of sanctity that those orthodoxies threatened to impose. Seldom have the stakes of compiling *ḥadīth* been so high.

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<sup>185</sup> Modarressi employs this periodisation, and at least for this first century it is an extremely valuable means of conceptualising Imāmī intellectual developments. See Modarressi, *Introduction*, pp. 23-58.

## II

### TAQĪYA – *al-Ṣadūq and Adab*

#### INTRODUCTION – *Other Compilations*

While the matter of the previous chapter, the legal-theological use of *ḥadīth*, of the texts' authenticity and transmission and of their role in the formation of doctrine, and of their incorporation into systematic epistemologies, must underpin any discussion of a *ḥadīth* scholar like al-Ṣadūq, it is not the only context in which his work must be examined. This is for the very good reason that it was not only in legal-theological works that *aḥādīth* were compiled in this era. There exists another area of intellectual endeavour which produced scores of compilations over the third/ninth, fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, compilations which, though they contained material from a wide variety of sources in which legal-theological scholarship had little interest, also contained a great many *aḥādīth*. This was *adab*.

*Adab* is a notoriously difficult term to define, a task to which we shall devote more attention presently. We may begin by remarking that al-Ṣadūq's relationship with *adab* has received no scholarly attention. No doubt as a result prominent place his works secured in the Imāmī legal-theological canon (and their lack of a place in canons of *adab*), he has been viewed exclusively as the property of the histories of Imāmī law and theology, in which context we examined him in the previous chapter. But this is not the sum of al-Ṣadūq. We observed in the previous chapter that while the compilation of the imāms' words was, in al-Ṣadūq's time, as momentous a task as ever it was, it was yet to be subject, at least by al-Ṣadūq, to a formal, systematic jurisprudence as taught in an institutionalised school. It is, perhaps, for this reason that we find al-Ṣadūq in the present chapter engaging the imāms' *ḥadīth* in contexts quite other than the legal and the theological, exploring both an eccentric and whimsical range of topics and a set of forms and genres that leaves us no choice but to radically reconsider the view of him as the sole property of Imāmī theology and law. Such explorations of form and content were not random, nor were they unique, rather they place al-Ṣadūq squarely in the context of the literature of *adab*, a literature by which he was surrounded at the court of Rayy where he composed much of his work. This context, we will here contend, was a formative one, and the understanding thereof is essential to understanding both al-Ṣadūq's writings and his significance as a compiler and a scholar. It creates in al-Ṣadūq a fascinating interplay of literary and sectarian identities which we will here begin to explore in some of his most enigmatic works.

## ADAB AND ADAB LITERATURE IN THE BUWAYHID PERIOD

It is an emerging consensus that *adab* is a term that eludes exhaustive definition.<sup>186</sup> Nonetheless, to proceed further without a working definition cannot be an option given this chapter's stated objectives. We are aided in this necessity by the perspicacious scholarship that continues to appear on the subject and by the specifics of our context, being the later fourth/tenth century, and the limits of what pertains to al-Ṣadūq and his activities.

The noun *adab* had a number of meanings in the fourth/tenth century context, foremost amongst them including good manners, moral education (often equated to the Greek παιδεία) and sound literary and philological knowledge.<sup>187</sup> As well as such abstract concepts (for which we will use the shorthand *adab* as culture<sup>188</sup>), however, *adab* could also refer to a body of texts in which this erudition and virtue could be discovered (which we will call *adab* as corpus). This concept of *adab* as corpus is, in turn, to be distinguished from what scholars term '*adab* literature,' being literature which self-consciously undertakes to convey *adab* (*adab* as culture) primarily by means of collecting and presenting *adab* (*adab* as corpus). Thus a poem might be referred to as *adab* (as corpus), containing as it might philological and cultural erudition (*adab* as culture), but could not by itself be called *adab* literature. A compendium in which that poem was included on the basis of its constituting *adab* (as corpus) and containing *adab* (as culture) would be called *adab* literature. Thus a variety of different literary genres and even texts within genres can be concerned with *adab* and thus be classed as *adab* literature to varying degrees, with different scholars offering different verdicts of exactly where the line falls to define what conventionally falls within the *adab* literature. Thus the *adab* compendium (see below), which is devoted entirely and explicitly to collecting *adab* as corpus for the purpose of imparting *adab* as culture, is comfortably at the heart of *adab* literature. A genre like the universal history, on the other hand, exhibits considerable variation in different

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<sup>186</sup> Bonebakker, p. 30, Orfali, p. 29. This is compounded not only by the term's eventful philological history in the early centuries of Islam (before the kinds of writing examined in this chapter appeared), but also its active service in a number of ideological projects in the modern period. See Bonebakker, pp. 16-19, Kilpatrick, '*Adab*', p. 56.

<sup>187</sup> Bonebakker, pp. 16-24, Kilpatrick, '*Adab*', pp. 54-55.

<sup>188</sup> 'Culture' seems as close a one-word translation of *adab*'s conception in the abstract as can be found. Culture has the advantage of evoking, like *adab*, a property that can be acquired; one could seek to acquire or impart *adab* just as one might seek to become more cultured or render others so. The two terms, moreover, have considerable conceptual overlap: much of what falls under *adab*'s semantic field (poetry, manners, even philological scholarship) is also covered by that of culture. Nonetheless, these overlaps have their inevitable limits and to use 'culture' as a straight translation of *adab* would, as the following makes abundantly clear, be quite impracticable. For examples of effective use of the term 'culture' to discuss *adab* see Kilpatrick and Leder, pp. 18-23, Bonebakker, pp. 19-24.

authors' interest in *adab* in relation to their interest in, for example, salvation history.<sup>189</sup> The very act of chronicling the exploits of recent rulers may be classed by some as essentially concerned with *adab* by virtue its capacity to morally and culturally educate the reader, but others may differ. Meanwhile, an anthology of poetry might be classed as *adab* in that it clearly intends to impart *adab* as culture inasmuch as it concerns poetic erudition and philology, but might be distanced from inclusion on account of its not being much concerned with the moral dimensions of *adab* as culture, depending on the intentions of the anthologist, which might be expressed or unexpressed, or the contents of the poems themselves.<sup>190 191</sup>

The word *adīb* (p. *udabā*'), meanwhile, can be an adjective describing one endowed with *adab* (as culture, which would in turn usually imply having a good deal of *adab* as corpus at one's disposal), but it can also be a noun referring to the author of *adab* literature. In this thesis, following convention, we will use *adīb* exclusively in this second meaning denoting the author of *adab* literature.

Who, then, were the *udabā*', those members of society in this era who were interested in *adab*, such that they were concerned to collect and compile it (*adab* as corpus) and convey and disseminate it (*adab* as culture)? A central role was played by the secretaries of the chancery (*kuttāb*, sg. *kātib*), exemplified by the pioneering figure of ibn Qutayba. His *adab* compendium *Adab al-kuttāb* ('The *Adab* of the Secretaries') sets out a corpus of texts that constitutes and contains the essential moral, social and literary education of an Abbasid secretary. They should be well-mannered, astute in obeying, honouring and humouring their powerful masters, consummately literate in the Arabic language and its literature. Already by ibn Qutayba's time, however, it was not only secretaries to whom *adab* pertained, and other *adab* compendia

<sup>189</sup> Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography*, pp. 83-130.

<sup>190</sup> Orfali, pp. 29-32.

<sup>191</sup> As already noted, definitions of *adab* are elusive creatures. For valuable discussions of the scholarly understanding of *adab* as it stands see Orfali, pp. 29-37 (this study in particular is supported by a prodigious bibliography); Kilpatrick, 'A Genre', pp. 34-39; Bonebakker; Fähdrieh. For a broader, more descriptive survey of *adab*'s manifestations writings see Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography*, pp. 83-130.

The threefold conceptualisation offered here will not overtly be much in evidence in what follows, since this chapter will focus in the main on *adab* literature specifically. This *adab* as culture/*adab* as corpus/*adab* literature schema serves us well here as a definition of the nature and constitution of that literature and its relationship to other uses of the term *adab*.

In particular this conceptualisation seeks to avoid the pitfalls of seeking to understand *adab* primarily in terms of genre. Bonebakker experiments such a model, but inevitably confronts the problem that any notion of '*adab* as genre' must inevitably end up excluding important examples of what Abbasid readers would have considered to be texts that constituted or were concerned with *adab* (pp. 27-30). Kilpatrick ('*Adab*') offers instead the notion of *adab* as an *approach* to writing, which may be observed at work across a variety of genres and themes (p. 56). Ultimately, any model for dealing with *adab* must be able to grapple with the fact that *adab* is associated with different concepts, texts and genres (histories, collections of letters and *maqāmāt* to name but a few) in different ways and to different extents, which can depend as much on the intentions of authors as on the genres they inhabit.

ibn Qutayba extended his reach. His *al-Ma'ārif* undertakes to educate a wider body of courtly literati, equipping them with such material and manners as are required to participate effectively in the discussions and soirees of the great and the good. A third work, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, spreads its net the widest, aiming to improve the reading public at large, be they paupers or princes.<sup>192</sup>

This range of audiences in ibn Qutayba's works reflects well the increasingly expansive character of *adab* literature in the later third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. Under the Umayyads *adab* literature had been predominantly written by the court for the court, but by the time al-Ṣadūq was writing the authors of *adab* literature were aiming to convey *adab* to as wide a readership as possible.<sup>193</sup> This expansion was meanwhile accompanied by a corresponding broadening of the kinds of people who were writing *adab* literature, which ceased to be much confined by one's profession. In the figure of al-Tawḥīdī we have a consummate *adīb* who strove to make a living solely from his literary output, but we also see works of *adab* being written by viziers and by merchants. Authors of *adab* literature were also regularly active figures in legal-theological scholarship.

As far as al-Ṣadūq is concerned, we will here be examining certain of his works in relation to the core of *adab* literature mentioned above, the *adab* compendium. This is a collection of texts which a compiler puts together expressly for the purpose of imparting *adab* as culture. 'Peruse this work,' states the compiler of the *adab* compendium, 'And you shall be cultured.'<sup>194</sup> The *adab* compendium is a mixture of the interesting and the edifying, the entertaining and the improving. A typical one will contain lines of poetry, anecdotes about famous historical or legendary figures and also fables about unknown persons, verses from the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth* from the Prophet, proverbs, aphorisms and even jokes. The compendia are often distinguished by an intense breadth and variety of sources, citing Ṣūfī saints, Greek philosophers, pre-Islamic poets, theologians, lexicographers and prophets. They may be broadly classified as being either encyclopaedic compendia, aspiring to discuss a comprehensive range of appropriate topics, or monothematic compendia, where the material is united around a single theme or subject such as flowers or loneliness. These compendia proliferate in the tenth century when al-Ṣadūq is writing, the more famous compilers of such works including Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (414/1023), Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd Rabbih (d. 328/940), Abū Hilāl al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd Allāh al-'Askarī (d. c. 400/1010), 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) and al-Muḥassin b. 'Alī al-Tanūkhī (d. 384/994). Earlier

<sup>192</sup> See Lecompte, pp. 85-92, 102-107, 121-126, 143-146, 421-477, for a discussion of these works as well as their chronology.

<sup>193</sup> Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography*, p. 96.

<sup>194</sup> Kilpatrick and Leder, p. 13. See also below.

examples of such work meanwhile stretch back to the ninth century from the pens of such figures as al-Jāhiz, al-Mubarrad and Ibn Qutayba, a genealogy which the tenth-century writers often acknowledge.<sup>195</sup>

Despite the unparalleled ease with which the *adab* compendium may be identified as *adab* literature, the boundaries of this genre are still porous. Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, al-Tawhīdī’s *al-Baṣā’ir wa’l-dhakhā’ir* and al-Ābī’s *Nathr al-durr* all place themselves firmly in the category with clearly stated opening objectives to inculcate the reader with worthy, improving knowledge such as to make them a more effective member of mannered society.<sup>196</sup> With al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā’s *Ghurur al-fawā’id*, on the other hand, we have a work for which no introduction survives, and which therefore does not so forthcomingly classify itself alongside them. In this case, however, the work is extremely similar in character, in structure and in content to the former three, and we may therefore comfortably assume that it was compiled with the same objectives.<sup>197</sup> Al-Tanūkhī’s compendium *Nishwār al-muḥādara*, meanwhile, is less usual in its contents, the great majority of which is anecdotes about figures from the recent past, but the text sports an introduction in which al-Tanūkhī himself acknowledges this difference and makes it quite clear that despite his innovation his aims are still those of moral, social and cultural betterment such as are the heart of *adab* as culture.<sup>198</sup> Yet another less certain case is al-Miskawayh’s *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*. While this book contains a diverse set of morally improving texts gathered from a variety of sources, and starts with declared objectives of improving the moral character of the reader, al-Miskawayh links this objective to his other writings in which pursue the same goal through systematic, philosophically conceived ethics.<sup>199</sup> The compendium thus might be classed as too narrow in scope to be a true *adab* compendium, and instead considered some manner of philosophical miscellany. As such it illustrates the essential relativity of works’ and genres’ participation or not in *adab* literature with which we began this discussion. In such cases, we may suggest at the outset, it is better to see in such hybridity a belonging to both discourses rather than neither. It is in this spirit, then, that we approach al-Ṣadūq.

<sup>195</sup> For the importance and nature of the anthology in *adab* literature see Kilpatrick, ‘A Genre’; Kilpatrick and Leder, pp. 15-18, 20-23; Orfali, *passim*.

<sup>196</sup> See Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, vol. i, pp. 4-7, al-Tawhīdī, *al-Baṣā’ir wa’l-dhakhā’ir*, vol. i, pp. 11-15, al-Ābī, vol. i, pp. 22-25.

<sup>197</sup> Brockelmann; Kilpatrick & Leder, p. 21.

<sup>198</sup> Al-Tanūkhī, pp. 1-14.

<sup>199</sup> Al-Miskawayh’s writings on such matters were numerous, but it is his famous treatise on ethics, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, that he explicitly relates to *al-Ḥikma al-khālida* in the introduction to the latter. See al-Miskawayh, *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*, p. 25. See also *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, p. 2, and *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*, pp. 23-25 for the two works’ shared ethos, centred around what al-Miskawayh considers the primordial command, ‘Know thyself.’

## THE IMĀMĪYA, ADAB AND AL-ŞADŪQ

Al-Şadūq's case notwithstanding, the Imāmīya as a group have a distinguished presence in Buwayhid *adab* literature, counting among their number such distinguished *udabā'* as the philosopher and historian Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), the poet and vizier Manşūr b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ābī (d. c. 421/1030)<sup>200</sup> and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, who as well as his significance as a poet and an anthologist was a student of al-Mufīd and a foundational figure in Imāmī theology and jurisprudence. To look for *adab* in a tenth century Imāmī *ḥadīth* scholar is not, therefore, an unnatural forcing of the sources. Rather it is necessary response to a clear context of interactions, to which any balanced account of al-Şadūq's writings is obliged to consider his relationship.

This far from exhaustive list of protagonists already illustrates an important variable in Imāmī participation in Buwayhid *adab* and in the nature of the Imāmī presence in Buwayhid intellectual life more generally. This is the fact that to identify as an Imāmī in Buwayhid Iran and Iraq did not necessarily entail any particular attachment to Imāmī legal-theological scholarship. This state of affairs is most clearly illustrated in the figure of the bibliographer ibn al-Nadīm, an Imāmī who we know to have been active in philosophical circles, and whose catalogue of books makes it quite clear that he was at best minimally acquainted with the legal-theological thought of his contemporary fellow Imāmīs.<sup>201</sup> On the other end of the

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<sup>200</sup> Al-Ābī, it is clear, was a generation or two younger than al-Şadūq, and while details about his life are hard to come by, it should be noted that some scholars suggest that he studied with al-Şadūq in his youth. It is certain, meanwhile, that he knew ibn 'Abbād, and the two speak one another's praises. See Azarnoosh, Azartesh & Sana'i.

<sup>201</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm knows of al-Mufīd and claims to have 'seen' him, but this only serves to highlight the very different intellectual worlds which the two inhabited. To begin with, ibn al-Nadīm does not go on to list any of al-Mufīd's works, even though he notes his eminence among the Imāmīya. Moreover, he does not know of al-Kulaynī or *al-Kāfī*, a work that al-Mufīd meanwhile cites as the most trustworthy of Imāmī *ḥadīth* compendia. Concerning al-Şadūq himself, meanwhile, ibn al-Nadīm's knowledge is extremely vague. He includes an entry for 'Alī Ibn Bābawayh, al-Şadūq's father, and a little later another entry for one Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, author of an *al-Hidāya* who may be al-Şadūq, however identification cannot be certain since Ibn al-Nadīm gives no indication that this figure is indeed the son of Ibn Bābawayh the elder and lists only a single work. Indeed, when it comes to the ninth century ibn al-Nadīm has more to offer, giving works of a number of figures including al-Barqī and al-'Ayyāshī, who hold a central place in the *asānīd* of tenth century authors like al-Şadūq. Ibn al-Nadīm's knowledge of Imāmī legal-theological scholarship, then, is extremely patchy. His knowledge of his contemporary Imāmī authors is minimal, knowing neither their works nor of their key sources. While he is aware of older figures like al-Barqī, this is clearly not as a result of any detailed interaction with the Imāmī contemporaries who drew upon him so heavily. See ibn al-Nadīm, pp. 274-279, 308-314; Doge, vol. i, pp. xviii-xx. Also see Stewart, 'ibn al-Nadīm', for ibn al-Nadīm's relationship with the Ismā'īliya.



spectrum, we see in al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā a figure who was fully involved both in *adab* literature and in legal-theological scholarship.

This state of affairs is no different to the general pattern of *udabā'* and their backgrounds discussed above, but it is important to emphasise that the Imāmīya, though a comparatively small group, were still subject to the same divisions and diversities as broader society. Al-Miskawayh and al-Ṣadūq were contemporaries, both Imāmīs, both present at the court of Rayy and both associated with the vizier al-Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād, but this by no means implies that they overlapped intellectually. On the other hand, this diversity amongst Imāmīs should alert us to the fact that al-Ṣadūq's identity as a traditionist *faqīh* by no means negates the possibility that he was also involved in *adab* literature. Above all, the fact that one could be identified as an Imāmī whilst moving solely in the circles of philosophers and litterateurs – with no knowledge of those *ḥadīth* compendia and works of theology that we have subsequently become accustomed to think of as central to any Imāmī Shī'ī identity – illustrates the extraordinary openness of the Buwayhid court to Shī'īs, Shī'ī ideas and Shī'ī affiliations, allowing those ideas and affiliations a fluidity that they would seldom regain.

What, then, of al-Ṣadūq's affiliations? As already noted, he was present at the court at Rayy, a city through which passed many of the period's most illustrious *udabā'* including al-Miskawayh and al-Tawḥīdī. The only surviving work of al-Ṣadūq's that is dedicated to a potential patron in his *'Uyūn*, which is dedicated to ibn 'Abbād, the vizier at Rayy and one of most important and powerful literary patrons of the Buwayhid age.<sup>202</sup> While we do know from a remark by al-Tawḥīdī that al-Ṣadūq was at one point banished by ibn 'Abbād in a fit of hostility towards traditionists,<sup>203</sup> indicating that the relationship may not have been a profitable one, this event also corroborates the dedication of *'Uyūn* in its indication that there was a real acquaintance between the *faqīh* and the vizier, al-Ṣadūq constituting a prominent enough presence in the ibn 'Abbād's mind for the latter to bother banishing him. Beyond these fragments of his relationship with the vizier, sparse biography we have of al-Ṣadūq offers little indication of broader connections, and we have no record of what other company al-Ṣadūq might have kept at Rayy beyond his instructors and students in *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. Nonetheless, there are a number of indications in al-Ṣadūq's writings and elsewhere that extend his presence and interests beyond those areas in which he is best known.

Al-Ṣadūq is, in fact, cited twice in an *adab* compendium written by his contemporary at Rayy Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī. In his *al-Ṣadāqa wa'l-ṣadīq*, a monothematic compendium on the subject of friendship, al-Tawḥīdī twice quotes from al-Ṣadūq, once quoting a maxim from al-

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<sup>202</sup> See Naaman, *passim*.

<sup>203</sup> Al-Tawḥīdī, *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn*, pp. 166-167.

Ṣadūq himself and once narrating from him a *ḥadīth* from Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq.<sup>204</sup> Though isolated, the evidence of this citation is significant in placing al-Ṣadūq within social and literary proximity to al-Tawḥīdī as well as geographical.<sup>205</sup> Much more extensive and decisive, meanwhile, is the evidence available in al-Ṣadūq’s own writings. Here we find a great deal to place him far outside the mould of the simple *ḥadīth*-gather in which he is usually seen. We have already observed that al-Ṣadūq is more likely than his predecessors amongst the Imāmī *ḥadīth* compilers to step out from behind narrated material to explain things *in propria persona*.<sup>206</sup> Less remarked upon, however, is that alongside this willingness to insert his own voice al-Ṣadūq draws on the voices of a range of other figures quite unprecedented in earlier Imāmī *ḥadīth* compendia. It is rare indeed to see al-Barqī or al-Kulaynī speak *in propria persona*, but never do we see them cite authorities other than the *aḥādīth* to which their works are devoted. In complete contrast, we see al-Ṣadūq give explicit reference to lexicographers, litterateurs, historians, grammarians and poets, among them the famed scholar of poetry and chess-player Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/947)<sup>207</sup> and the pioneering philologist and lexicographer ‘Abd al-Malik b. Qurayb al-Aṣma‘ī (d. 213/828),<sup>208</sup> both staples of *adab* compendia of the period. In terms of a discretely observed ‘Imāmī thought,’ this may well strengthen the narrative we explored in chapter one of ever more assertive Imāmī scholars after the occultation. More importantly, however, it shows the limits of an examination of al-Ṣadūq solely in such terms, for his writings are in an inclusive conversation with a variety of discourses beyond that of his own sectarian group. Specific to our purposes, al-Ṣadūq’s citations bring him into clear conversation with *adab*.

In the main these citations are found in the service of the imāms’ *aḥādīth*. Al-Ṣadūq draws on poets and lexicographers to explore contentious vocabulary within the *aḥādīth*, whilst biographers and historians serve as a source for the *aḥādīth* themselves. Thus far, then, the conversation with *adab* is thoroughly subservient to legal-theological concerns, indeed to legal-theological texts. What alters this dynamic is the range of subjects about which al-Ṣadūq calls on the imāms’ *aḥādīth* to speak. To look at the listings of his prolific output given in al-Ṭūsī and especially in al-Najāshī, one is left in no doubt that al-Ṣadūq was first and foremost a scholar of the law. The great majority of the works listed in these bibliographies are clearly identified by their recorded titles as treatises on individual legal topics: ‘Epistle on Pilgrimage,’ ‘The Book of Prayer,’ ‘The book of Ablution’ and so on, while many more profess to deal with theological matters or with methodological concerns like *rijāl*.

<sup>204</sup> Al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Ṣadāqa wa’l-ṣadīq*, pp. 203, 291.

<sup>205</sup> See below.

<sup>206</sup> Gleave, pp. 352, 360-361, 381-382.

<sup>207</sup> E.g. *‘Uyūn*, p. 25.

<sup>208</sup> E.g. *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 277.

Nonetheless, there remains a minority of recorded works which address areas significantly beyond this purview, a number of which survive for us to examine.

Among those lost works whose recorded titles catch regretful eyes are a book on history (*al-Tārīkh*), a book on poetry (*al-shi'r*), a commentary on an ode (*Tafsīr qaṣīda fī ahl al-bayt*) a book on firsts (*al-Awā'il*) and one on lasts (*al-awākhir*).<sup>209</sup> In their titles we already see that the breadth of interest found in al-Ṣadūq's citations found expression in whole books dedicated to subjects beyond the conventional reach of legal-theological concerns such as we find addressed in works like *al-I'tiqādāt* and *al-Hidāya*, subjects which, meanwhile, are deeply embedded in *adab* discourse. We are not, fortunately, restricted to titles of forgotten texts, but possess a number of books from among those extant which clearly go beyond the purview of usual legal-theological literature and resonate instead with the interests of *adab*. This is most emphatically the case in five of his extant works: *al-Khiṣāl*, *al-Mawā'iz*, *'Ilal al-sharā'i'* and *Muṣādaqa al-ikhwān* (a number of others certainly contain *adabī* elements but in a less formative capacity, as will be discussed below). Two of these exhibit clear and substantial overlap with *adab* in their subject matter. *Al-Mawā'iz*, 'The Counsels,' in which are compiled the words of wisdom that the Prophet and the Imāms imparted to their successors, often as a parting testament (*waṣīya*), presents Imāmī manifestation of the *adab* staple of wisdom literature.<sup>210</sup> In *Muṣādaqa al-ikhwān*, 'Sincerity amongst Brethren,' meanwhile, which discusses the virtues friendship and courtesy amongst fellow believers, we have treatise, again in the words of the imāms, on topics of central interest to *adab* writers of the period.<sup>211</sup>

The two other works, *al-Khiṣāl* (The Qualities/Numbers<sup>212</sup>) and *'Ilal al-sharā'i'* (The Causes of Laws),<sup>213</sup> are a larger and more complex affair. These two books share a recognisably common structural pattern. Both compile a considerable, extremely diverse volume of Imāmī *akhbār* under the rubric of a single, more or less eccentric, overarching theme. In *'Ilal al-sharā'i'*, 'The Causes of Laws,' this principle is that of causation, but it is far from being restricted to matters of law. We read *aḥādīth* explaining phenomena as diverse as why the sky

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<sup>209</sup> Books of 'Firsts' constitute a particular genre of *adab* compendium, in which were listed for the curiosity and betterment of those who would be cultured anecdotes concerning the first precedents of activities and events as diverse as the first person to be stoned for adultery, the first person to draw lots for a godly cause, the first person to hire Turkic soldiers and the first person to pledge allegiance to 'Alī. The best-known surviving such compendium by a contemporary of al-Ṣadūq is the *al-Awā'il* of Abū Hilāl al-'Askarī. The book of 'lasts' is a less common phenomenon for obvious reasons, and in later literature sometimes appears discussing mystical and eschatological themes. We can, alas, only guess as to what al-Ṣadūq made of the genre.

<sup>210</sup> For wisdom literature's significance in and relation to *adab* literature see Gutas, pp. 55-57, 62-69; Kilpatrick, 'Adab', p. 55; Kilpatrick & Leder, p. 4.

<sup>211</sup> See Alshaar, *passim*.

<sup>212</sup> See below.

<sup>213</sup> The book's full title is *Kitāb 'ilal al-sharā'i' wa al-aḥkām wa al-asbāb*.

is called the sky,<sup>214</sup> why corpses weep,<sup>215</sup> why the sunset prayer contains only three bowings,<sup>216</sup> why pregnancy interrupts menstruation,<sup>217</sup> why the world's peoples differ in appearance,<sup>218</sup> why 'Alī was unable to lift the Prophet on his shoulders when smashing the idols in the Ka'ba<sup>219</sup> and why Ja'far al-Ṣādiq stopped brushing his teeth two years before he died.<sup>220</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*'s organising principle, meanwhile, is based on a pun in the title, which can mean both 'The Numbers (or Quantities)' or 'The Qualities.' The book is structured according to the first of these meanings, each chapter being devoted to a number (first giving chapters on each from one to twenty, then rather more sporadically chapters covering higher numbers up to one hundred) and containing traditions in which that number appears. The contents, however, recalls the second meaning, with most of the book's traditions enumerating qualities of some sort: the five virtues which guarantee paradise, the four marks of a Shī'ī and so forth. The organising schemata of these two books do not find many exact parallels elsewhere in *adab* literature, but they fit utterly into the broader convention of what some scholars term monothematic compendia.<sup>221</sup> *Adab* writers routinely produced collections of interesting and edifying material based around a given theme, and the range of themes we see selected is more than broad enough to accommodate those of causality and number (including the books of firsts, one of which al-Ṣadūq wrote), giving expression to the powerful encyclopaedic impulse of intellectual culture in the fourth/tenth century.<sup>222</sup> Meanwhile, in *al-Khiṣāl*'s case we have a close parallel in al-Tha'ālibī's *Bard al-akbād fī l-a'dād*, a collection of poetic gobbets ordered like *al-Khiṣāl* on the basis of the numbers they contain.

As well as the strong affinities with *adab* observable in their form and content, it is also clear is that the character of these books forms the starkest of contrasts with more familiar models of *ḥadīth* compendium favoured in legal-theological literature. al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī* is a case in point. *Al-Kāfī*, whose title tellingly translates as 'The Sufficient' or 'The Comprehensive' presents itself unambiguously as an encyclopaedia of everything the believer needs to know, dividing its material precisely into *uṣūl* and *furū'*, law and theology, each of which are addressed in extensive and systematic detail. This eponymous sufficiency, however, must be challenged by the eclectic diversity of *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl*. *Al-Kāfī* answer questions regarding the nature of God's attributes, correct ablution and the continuation of the imāmate, but it does not address the ten qualities of the watermelon, Mu'āwiya's grievances against 'Abd Allah b.

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<sup>214</sup> *ʿIlal*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 311-312.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 282-283.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-22.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171-174.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>221</sup> See Orfali, p. 49.

<sup>222</sup> See Kilpatrick, 'A Genre', pp. 34-35.

‘answer questions regarding the nature of God’s’<sup>223</sup> Excluded from sufficiency, such questions, the very stuff of these compendia of al-Ṣadūq, are deemed by al-Kulaynī to be unnecessary. In *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl* we therefore encounter a different image of the imāms, and a much more expansive vision of the kinds of questions that their recorded speech may be expected to answer. This expansion takes al-Ṣadūq’s compendia beyond the bounds of legal theological discourse and into the curiosities that commonly distinguish *adab*. We are compelled to ask to what end he takes his compiling of the imāms’ *ḥadīth* in such a direction.

### SOTERIOLOGY AND ECLECTICISM – *When Adab Meets Ḥadīth*

In understanding the purpose of al-Ṣadūq’s adoption of the characteristics of *adab* literature, it is important first to note that these characteristics are not unprecedented in Imāmī *ḥadīth* literature, rather we find a clear and significant predecessor in the person of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893). Among the extant books of al-Barqī’s mostly lost magnum opus *al-Maḥāsin* we find two books which largely echo the structural schemata of *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl* respectively: *al-ʿIlal* and *al-Ashkāl wa'l-qarāʾin*. Both books are much smaller (at least as they have come down to us) than the corresponding books by al-Ṣadūq but both order *aḥādīth* according to the same pattern of causality and number respectively, and both contain the same mix of contents. Like al-Ṣadūq, meanwhile, the recorded titles of al-Barqī’s lost works point to the same *adab*-inclining erudition, including works on maths, grammar, poetry and history.<sup>224</sup>

Unlike al-Ṣadūq’s *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl*, however, al-Barqī’s *al-ʿIlal* and *al-Ashkāl* and their unusual nature have been subjected to recent study by Vilozny, who suggests a number of explanations for al-Barqī’s having composed them as he has. These are their situation in the pre-Buwayhid, pre-canonical phase of Imāmī *ḥadīth*, al-Barqī’s having borrowed an *adabī* form for his *ḥadīth* compendia, the influence of Middle Persian traditions of wisdom literature and Imāmī customs for the dissemination of knowledge amongst the faithful, including ensuring that secret knowledge is not made available to the uninitiated.<sup>225</sup>

<sup>223</sup> See *al-Khiṣāl*, pp. 240-243; *ʿIlal*, p. 544. We need not infer from this that al-Kulaynī was ignorant of or disinterested in such matters, indeed biographical sources state that to the contrary he was widely educated in much greater range of subjects, subjects such as poetry and lexicography, than are discussed in *al-Kāfi*. See Amir-Moezzi & Ansari, pp. 139-141.

<sup>224</sup> Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>225</sup> Discussing in isolation the similarity between al-Ṣadūq’s *al-Khiṣāl* and al-Barqī’s *al-Ashkāl*, Vilozny suggests that al-Ṣadūq had not seen the book itself but rather received some of its contents through his teachers. He bases this on al-Ṣadūq’s omission of much of *al-Ashkāl*’s material from *al-Khiṣāl* and also

We must examine how these hypotheses may be applicable to al-Šadūq's apparent emulation of these same forms a century after al-Barqī. A first step is to interrogate the relationship between these two scholars that we may better understand the nature of that emulation. It is clear that this was one of emphatic influence of al-Barqī upon al-Šadūq. Al-Barqī is a regular presence in al-Šadūq's *asānīd*, and in *al-Faqīh* al-Šadūq names al-Barqī's *al-Maḥāsīn* as one of the well-known books from which the texts in *al-Faqīh* are sourced.<sup>226</sup> Moreover, there are two further books from *al-Maḥāsīn* of which al-Šadūq authored compendia with the same titles, *ʿIqāb al-aʿmāl* (Deeds and their Punishments) and *Thawāb al-aʿmāl* (Deeds and their Rewards), and from the bibliographical record we know of many other pairs of similar works by the two authors, one or both of which is lost.<sup>227</sup> In the extant works we can see that this emulation goes far beyond the titles, with sizeable portions and sometimes the majority of the material in al-Barqī's books appearing in the parallel work by al-Šadūq.<sup>228</sup> It is further recorded that al-Šadūq wrote a commentary on al-Barqī's *al-Rijāl*, the only recorded incident of his having written a commentary on the work of a named author. We thus see across al-Šadūq's work, including those aspects of his oeuvre which depart from usual legal-theological paradigms of subject matter, a marked interest in and indebtedness to his ninth-century predecessor.

This solid genealogy of influence between the two scholars renders Viložny's conclusions regarding the nature of al-Barqī's writings all the more pertinent to al-Šadūq. In particular, his characterisation of *al-Ashkāl* as borrowing its structure from *adab* literature seems even more relevant for al-Šadūq, given our knowledge of his proximity to *adab* circles.<sup>229 230</sup> On the other hand, al-Šadūq's similarity to al-Barqī in these writings problematizes Viložny's attribution of the style of *al-Ashkāl* and *al-ʿIlal* to al-Barqī's pre-Buwayhid and 'pre-canonical' context.

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on al-Šadūq's introduction to the latter work in which he justifies its composition with the observation that his fellow scholars have yet to produce such a work. (Viložny, 'A Concise Numerical Guide', p. 72). This conclusion, however, neither takes into account the extensive evidence of al-Šadūq's interest in al-Barqī's oeuvre outlined here, nor the fact that the author's claim that a work has no precedent is a standard topos in Medieval Arabic scholarship, and thus does not constitute proof that an author making such a claim as al-Šadūq does is, indeed, ignorant of such clear predecessors as may exist.

<sup>226</sup> *Al-Faqīh*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>227</sup> These include a lost *al-Mawāʿiẓ* by al-Barqī (al-Šadūq's *al-Mawāʿiẓ* being extant), amongst others. It is worth noting that al-Barqī had an awkward fondness for titles (' and so on) which do not directly reveal a book's subject. Amongst such works there may therefore be further doppelgangers to al-Šadūq's later compilations.

<sup>228</sup> We should further bear in mind the possibility entertained by Viložny that al-Barqī's works may be incompletely transmitted. (Viložny, 'A Concise Numerical Guide', p. 73). It is therefore possible that complete versions of these works contained even more material that al-Šadūq recycled in similar format, or, indeed, more material that he did not.

<sup>229</sup> Viložny's suggestion that *taqīya* may play a role will be addressed in depth below.

<sup>230</sup> We know even less of al-Barqī's life than we do of al-Šadūq's, a lack of evidence which compels us for now to remain agnostic regarding the question of whether he too had links to such circles. Al-Barqī, we must note, died long before Buwayhid rule facilitated such exchange, but that certainly does not rule it out.

It is intriguing in this regard that Viložny refers to Imāmī *ḥadīth* as being canonized under Buwayhid rule, for though three of the four canonical works of Imāmī *ḥadīth* were written under the Buwayhids, their canonisation as such only took place long after. It is true that Buwayhid Imāmī scholars, not least al-Mufīd and al-Ṭūsī who authored half of that canon, addressed with a formative vigour the question of how the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus was to be approached and routinized, but that process is already thoroughly in evidence before the Buwayhids in al-Kulaynī, and in al-Ṣadūq and later Buwayhid writers we meanwhile see a continuation of al-Barqī's style of compilation. This suggests, then, that rather than constituting an earlier stage in an evolutionary process that would ultimately give way to a less eccentric, more routinized style of compilation, al-Barqī and al-Ṣadūq present us with something more enduring and therefore more deliberate.

That it is purpose rather than outdated convention driving al-Ṣadūq's to compile *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl* as he does is illustrated nowhere better than by the fact that he elsewhere does things quite differently. As observed above, accounts of al-Ṣadūq's oeuvre as a whole reveal a solid focus on the conventional domains of legal-theological scholarship. Extant works like *al-Faqīh*, *al-Hidāya*, *al-Iʿtiqādāt* and *al-Muqniʿ* leave us in no doubt that al-Ṣadūq could write as solid a legal manual or creed as the next scholar, with no hint of digression into obscure taxonomies involving watermelons. The style of *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl* thus constitutes a clear authorial choice.

Let us return to another of Viložny's interpretations of al-Barqī's works, wherein he calls *al-Ashkāl* 'a collection of *ḥadīth* with an *adab* style and message.'<sup>231</sup> This is, as acknowledged above, a valuable identification of a precursor to al-Ṣadūq's engagement with *adabī* forms of compilation. The specific implications of this reading, however, come into conflict with the reality of al-Ṣadūq's context. 'A collection of *ḥadīth* with an *adab* style and message,' *Al-Ashkāl* is not for Viložny a work of *adab* in essence, rather it is an Imāmī *ḥadīth* collection that draws on the *adab* tradition for certain aspects of its construction. Viložny makes it quite clear in his discussion of *al-Ashkāl* that this *adabī* component is not considered of the foremost significance, dwelling primarily on the Imāmī doctrinal context of *al-Ashkāl*'s contents, and dwelling more on what its structure may owe to Pahlavi *andarz* literature than to ninth-century *adab*.<sup>232</sup> By the time we reach al-Ṣadūq in the latter fourth/tenth century, however, the structures of *ḥadīth* compendia have implications far beyond the formal. An illuminating voice is that of ibn Qūlawayh. In the same introduction to his *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* discussed in Chapter One, he writes as follows:

<sup>231</sup> Viložny, 'A Concise Numerical Guide' p. 69.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., pp. 73-75.

I have divided [this book] into chapters, and each of those chapters concerns one topic, such that it includes no *ḥadīth* that does not concern that topic. Were I to do so, this would distract the reader, rendering him unsure of what he sought, and of how and whence to seek it! Other authors have composed works in such a manner, fashioning chapters whose contents is contrary to how they are titled, chapters in which they cite *aḥādīth* that do not concern the topic of that chapter, even to the point where a chapter does not contain a single *ḥadīth* of clear pertinence amongst those that have absolutely no relevance to the title of the chapter!

My purpose [in avoiding such practices] was to make it easy for the reader who seeks a particular *ḥadīth* in this book, such that he may go straight to the relevant chapter for the *ḥadīth* he seeks and find it therein. In this way the reader will not tire of this book, nor will the one to whom it is read, and they may thus learn what God has in store for his devoted servant who visits the tomb of al-Ḥusayn and the master, God's blessings be upon them, and that they may increase in longing for the imāms and for the visiting of the imāms, God's blessings be upon them, seeking the abundant rewards and manifold blessings that God has promised them.<sup>233</sup>

For ibn Qūlawayh, we clearly see, how one structures *ḥadīth* compendia is an important and contentious issue. The last four lines are retained advisedly, for in these we see, as ibn Qūlawayh reverts to firmly beatific language, the divine justification for the more technical criticism dominating the previous lines. His point is simple enough: that he has ensured that his book is a functioning reference tool, that those in need of guidance may use it fruitfully without becoming bewildered or enraged. The stakes of this could not be higher, for the knowledge the book imparts if of the greatest salvific significance, and it must therefore be a disgrace on the part of the compiler should he not facilitate the reader's access to that knowledge. Ibn Qūlawayh names no names, but the author of *al-Khiṣāl* and *ʿIlal* must surely feel his ears burning.

Ibn Qūlawayh's invocation of the compiler's sacred duty to convey the imāms' teachings to the reader prompts us to reflect in detail on *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl*'s efficacy on that front. In this they may be illustratively compared to al-Ṣadūq's more conventional works, works like *al-Faqīh*, *al-Hidāya*, *al-Iʿtiqādāt* and *al-Muqniʿ*.<sup>234</sup> These four books are all staunchly legal-

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<sup>233</sup> Ibn Qūlawayh, pp. 6-7.

<sup>234</sup> The most prominent of these is the subsequently canonical *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, presenting itself as the convenient answer to all the perplexed Imāmī's legal queries. As well as unambiguously declaring this purpose in its introduction (*al-Faqīh*, pp. 12-14), the work facilitates and enacts doxothesis in its structure, arranged logically according to broad subject areas and derivative questions in what had become the standard layout for a legal manual. *Al-Faqīh* is not alone, though, and stands alongside a number of similar guides for the faithful. *Al-Iʿtiqādāt* is, as Fyzee's translation renders it,



theological in their subject matter, outlining correct practice or correct belief, and are all constructed clearly, deliberately and methodically to instruct the Imāmī faithful in their religion. They lay out their explications of creed and law according to established formulae, addressing pertinent topics for easy consultation, be it the minutiae of how to pray correctly or correct understandings of God and his attributes. Points are supported with proof-texts where necessary, cementing unambiguous affirmations of orthodoxy. Potential disputes and conflicts between different *aḥādīth* are disambiguated. Such works are, of course, entirely in keeping with the rich tradition of manuals of belief and practice produced in the Abbasid period and after by Muslim scholars of religion, and their instructive format seems so objectively born of their didactic purpose as to be seldom remarked upon. Its significance here, meanwhile, is the flamboyance with which *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl* depart from such structures. An Imāmī who has questions regarding times of prayer may, in *al-Faqīh*, turn to the relevant section,<sup>235</sup> and select from a number of juxtaposed chapters which are relevant to these questions. If, however, that reader is instead consulting *al-Khiṣāl*, he is in luck only if he wishes to read *aḥādīth* containing a particular number. If the more pressing matter of prayer times is still his concern, he may, perhaps, turn to the chapter on five in search of material pertaining to the five mandatory prayers, but he will have to sift through accounts of the five most accursed amongst humankind, the five mosques in Kufa in which it is forbidden to pray, the five companions of the Prophet for whom the Garden yearns and the five ways in which white roosters are similar to prophets,<sup>236</sup> in the hope of finding something useful. In *ʿIlal* one may turn to a demarcated section on prayer, but will still be frustrated in the search for definitive answers. The book frequently gives multiple, sometimes directly conflicting explanations for phenomena (the number of *rakaʿāt* in the sunset prayer, for example, are attributed both to divine command given during the *miʿrāj* and to Muḥammad’s joy at the birth of Fāṭima; the prohibition of wearing gold rings in prayer attributed variously to their being worn by the inhabitants of hell and their being sported by the inhabitants of paradise<sup>237</sup>).<sup>238</sup>

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‘a Shiite creed,’ economically and definitively explaining the Imāmī position in matters of theology. *Al-Muqniʿ*, meanwhile, is another legal manual of a very similar mould to *al-Faqīh*, and *al-Hidāya* is another brief legal manual with a creed affixed.

<sup>235</sup> As well as a great many other matters, *ʿIlal* does contain large sections dealing with prayer, purity, fasting and pilgrimage. It must be noted that these are not signposted as discrete sections, but the chapters of which they are made up are unmistakeably grouped together according to shared subject matter.

<sup>236</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, p. 329.

<sup>237</sup> *ʿIlal*, p. 334.

<sup>238</sup> *ʿIlal* has remained a popular work up until modern times. An important element of that popularity is a genealogy of scholars stretching from al-Shahīd al-Thānī to Rūḥullāh Khumaynī, who found within it confirmation of their esoteric understandings of prayer. That they should have done so draws attention to the fact that although, as we have seen, al-Ṣadūq’s discussion of prayer in *ʿIlal* certainly does not set out to draw a systematised, gnostic understanding of such things, it contains much material which is of

The issue here is not the absence of information in the *aḥādīth*. Both of these compendia contain much that must be of interest to even the most pedantic of inquirers: one stumbles across material regarding the legal status of praying in marshland, of wearing skins of unusual creatures and drinking from silver goblets.<sup>239</sup> Rather the way in which these narrations are compiled, not to mention the many unapologetic contradictions, means that only extreme good fortune or extreme patients will deliver specific information on demand. If we apply the demands of ibn Qūlawayh to these texts the verdict is clear: al-Ṣadūq, as he buries valuable information on the impermissibility of playing chess amongst physiognomical observations,<sup>240</sup> is callously obstructing his readers' capacity to consult the soteriologically indispensable speech of the imāms, creating the pernicious inverse of a good reference work.

Such are the momentous stakes of the enigma that is these books' compilation, the urgency of the question of their purpose and the impossibility of viewing them as *ḥadīth* compendia like any other. Their departure from the didactic norms of legal-theological compilation as outlined by ibn Qūlawayh is highly morally and epistemologically charged, and liable to provoke severe censure from al-Ṣadūq's fellow scholars. We are thus compelled to seriously examine the reasons behind these works' being structured as they are, and in so doing to interrogate their relationship with the *adab* literature whence those structures appear to be derived. Of what use is *adab* to al-Ṣadūq?

## ADDRESSING THE MASSES

We have established that these books do not undertake to instruct the Imāmī faithful after the manner of more conventional, legal-theological *ḥadīth* compendia. It is possible that they are intended to instruct these same Imāmī readers in a different fashion, but it is also possible that they are written with a different readership in mind. Some preliminary clues to these books' intended audience may be found in their introductions. At first glance we are not well-served therein, for *ʿIlal*, *al-Khiṣāl* and smaller works with *adabī* characters like *al-Mawāʿiẓ* and

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interest and use to those who might wish to. The significance of this is that while the Imāmī interest in such matters begins in earnest a few centuries later, al-Ṣadūq had around him a great many contemporaries of other Shīʿī denominations who were already enthusiastic proponents of such modes of thought. For reasons which will have become clear by the end of the previous chapter, one does not need to look hard to find groups with a greater interest in non-compiled systematic discourse than al-Ṣadūq. Within the Shīʿī context, these range from some writings attributed to Zaydī and Fātimid Imāms which set out defined interpretative schemata for various doctrines to Zaydī writings on *kalām* to the elaborate philosophical systems of Ismāʿīlī *duʿāt* like al-Sijistānī and Nuṣayrīs like al-Khaṣībī, as well as the writings of the Brethren of Purity.

<sup>239</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, pp. 374, *ʿIlal*, pp. 314-315, 328-329.

<sup>240</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, pp. 276-8.

*Muṣādaqa* either have no introduction or an extremely brief one. Nowhere do we see a text to match the extended theological polemic with which al-Ṣadūq introduces *Kamāl al-dīn*, or even the terse but clear statements of intention which begin *al-Faqīh* and *al-Tawhīd*.

This very absence may be a telling one, however. Though al-Ṣadūq nowhere provides us with an introduction which squarely places a work in an *adabī* context after the manner of al-Tawhīdī or ibn Qutayba, we should not disregard his choice not to introduce them with specifically Imāmī discourse. Al-Ṣadūq opens *al-Tawhīd* by stating that this book is to refute those among the opponents of the Imāmīya who denounce the reported speech of the imāms as theologically unsound.<sup>241</sup> He opens *al-Faqīh* by expressing his ambition for it to serve as a convenient and comprehensive reference,<sup>242</sup> and he opens *Kamāl al-dīn* with an extensive inter-Shīʿī polemic regarding the identity and legitimacy of the true imām.<sup>243</sup> We would be well-entitled to expect him to open *ʿIlal*, *al-Khiṣāl* or *al-Mawāʿiẓ* with similar declarations of how these texts are (for instance) intended to instruct the faithful in the breadth of the imāms' knowledge or the improving value of their sermons, but we find no such declaration. Viložny reads al-Barqī's *al-ʿIlal* as undertaking to illustrate the principle that 'God has done nothing without cause,' and indeed that the imāms are privy to such causes.<sup>244</sup> While the reader of either al-Barqī's *al-ʿIlal* or al-Ṣadūq's *ʿIlal* is liable to be persuaded of such a conclusion, they are left to their own devices to do so, with al-Ṣadūq's usual explanation of what he hopes the reader will learn from his compilation remaining a conspicuous absence. In *al-Khiṣāl* and *al-Mawāʿiẓ*, for which a brief introduction is supplied, the books' material is introduced in very different tones. *Al-Mawāʿiẓ*'s contents are introduced as 'precious glimmers and iridescent jewels, counsels of the house of prophecy,' and the one who reads, ponders and memorises them is promised blessings and provenance.<sup>245</sup> At the beginning of *al-Khiṣāl*, meanwhile, al-Ṣadūq notes simply that none of his predecessors have authored a book comprising 'Those numbers and qualities/quantities that are praised and those that are condemned,' and thus he did it himself, considering such a work a boon for seekers of knowledge and virtue.<sup>246</sup>

These are not, it is true, paeans to the virtue of erudition or detailed musings on the programmatic education of the masses such as open the classic examples of the *adab* compendium.<sup>247</sup> But they are shorn of sectarian polemic, speaking only in the most general of

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<sup>241</sup> *Al-Tawhīd*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>242</sup> *Al-Faqīh*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>243</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 31-157.

<sup>244</sup> Viložny, 'Réflexions', p. 417.

<sup>245</sup> *Al-Mawāʿiẓ*, p. 293.

<sup>246</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>247</sup> See above.

terms about the benefits of knowledge and the virtue of such wisdom as they contain. Moreover, while *al-Khiṣāl*'s introduction does start with a brief invocation declaring the truth of the imāms and the necessity of following their teachings,<sup>248</sup> *al-Mawā'iz* not only lacks such an explicitly Imāmī evocation but instead begins by praising only the Prophet, 'Alī and the Prophet's 'successors' (*khulafā'*, sg. *khaliḥfa*), this last word appearing as a conspicuous evasion of Shī'ī vocabulary (*imām*, *waṣī* etc).<sup>249</sup> Such features put these books at a conspicuous distance from works like *al-Tawhīd* and *Kamāl al-dīn*, and closer still to the *adab* compendia that they resemble in many other ways. Al-Ṣadūq is here making efforts to cast his book as wisdom literature like any other, courting the same readership for the imāms' words as is found for *adab*'s accustomed constellation of sages, saints, Greeks, Persians, poets and fools. In such a context *'Ilal*'s lack of any introduction looks more significant, and may thus be read as a similar attempt to court a broader audience than would be available to a book that began with the stated aim of demonstrating the imāms' unique insight into God's creative wisdom.

This downplaying of explicit sectarianism in pursuit of a wider readership is also observable in the bodies of *'Ilal* and *al-Khiṣāl*, where we see the more forceful notes of Shī'ī discourse deliberately censored. A textbook case is the vilification of Muḥammad's wife 'Ā'isha and the first three caliphs Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān, figures whom Shī'īs hold primarily responsible for the catastrophic prevention of 'Alī's succession to Muḥammad, but whom Sunnīs conversely revere. While we find (often comic) denunciations in these books of less revered characters like Mu'āwiya,<sup>250</sup> *aḥādīth* condemning these more venerable figures are quite absent, an absence which sometimes leaves a visible hole. A list of six figures who are destined for the fire names Mu'āwiya alongside accomplices like Abū Musā al-Ash'arī and 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ, but ends by stating that the narrator 'had forgotten two of them,' without a doubt suppressing the names of Abū Bakr and 'Umar.<sup>251</sup> In other Imāmī contexts we find Abū Bakr and 'Umar roundly criticised for their wickedly and blatantly ignoring Muḥammad's clear designation of 'Alī at Ghadīr Khumm, but in *al-Khiṣāl* we find a rather different Abū Bakr, contrite on his deathbed expressing regret that he did not heed 'Alī's designation as he should have.<sup>252</sup> In *'Ilal* a group of narrations discussing how the phrase *'ḥayy 'alā khayr al-'amal*' was wrongly omitted from the call to prayer due to the shortcomings of 'Umar are not presented in a discrete chapter as one would expect, but are instead buried in a bulk of other material in the chapter on the obscure matters (*nawādir*) of prayer.<sup>253</sup> As for 'Ā'isha, *al-Khiṣāl*

<sup>248</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, p. 17.

<sup>249</sup> *Al-Mawā'iz*, p. 293.

<sup>250</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, p. 219.

<sup>251</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, p. 529.

<sup>252</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, pp. 503-509.

<sup>253</sup> *'Ilal*, pp. 352-353.

gives a list of three individuals who lied about Muḥammad: Abū Hurayra, Anas b. Mālik and ‘a woman.’<sup>254</sup>

This sanitising of the more virulently sectarian voices in al-Ṣadūq’s *ḥadīth* make it quite plain that these texts are courting a non-Imāmī audience. Al-Ṣadūq is not merely borrowing the structures of *adab*, he is reaching out to the same readership, thus bringing these texts much closer to identification as works of *adab* in a sense that goes beyond formal emulation. In these books al-Ṣadūq makes a deliberate attempt to participate in *adab* literature and to address its audience.

### PERFECT SPEECH – *Adab and the Imāms*

What are we to make of al-Ṣadūq’s apparent wish to educate non-Imāmīs in what the imāms had to say about the comparative luminescences of the sun and the moon?<sup>255</sup> As we have seen, the little al-Ṣadūq tells us in the introductions to his works is most illustrative in what is left unsaid. More forthcoming is the introduction of an iconic text of Buwayhid Imāmī *adab* from a few decades later. This is al-Sharīf al-Raḍī’s *Nahj al-balāgha*. Unlike al-Ṣadūq, al-Raḍī was recognised first and foremost as a poet and litterateur,<sup>256</sup> but he was also distinguished legal-theological scholar, who had been a student of al-Mufīd. *Nahj al-balāgha* is similar in many ways to *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl*. Like them, it resembles the form of a monothematic *adab* compendium composed only of the sayings of the imāms, or in this case only one imām, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. As its title indicates, *Nahj al-balāgha* (‘The Peak of Eloquence’) sets out to collect and present ‘Alī’s words on the basis of their supreme rhetorical value, and is accordingly along rhetorical lines that the book is arranged, dividing ‘Alī’s words on the basis of form (sermon, epistle and aphorism) rather than of content. As with al-Ṣadūq’s works, this structure naturally limits the book’s use as a manual for those seeking specific theological or legal instruction from the imām’s words, or indeed answers to historical disputes. ‘I do not aspire to sequence and structure,’ al-Raḍī tells the reader, ‘but to glimmers and subtleties,’ closely echoing he does so al-Ṣadūq’s introduction of *al-Mawāʿiz* as ‘precious glimmers and iridescent jewels.’<sup>257</sup> Al-Raḍī’s list of the beneficial content of ‘Alī’s speech is a veritable

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<sup>254</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, p. 218.

<sup>255</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, p. 533.

<sup>256</sup> Indeed, Mubārak considers him the very greatest of Arab poets. See Mubārak, p. 8 and *passim*.

<sup>257</sup> Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, p. 17. *Nahj al-balāgha* has enjoyed a long and eventful reception history as a revered repository of ‘Alī’s speech that has quite obscured its origins in a distinctly *adabī* context. So extraordinary is the extent of this that the covers of modern editions often present the work as authored by the imām, with no sign of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī. That al-Raḍī’s interests lay quite outside certifying the authenticity of the book’s contents is clear from his unapologetic discarding of all *asānīd*,

check-list of the *adab* compendium: ‘Sermons, epistles, counsels and manners’ (*ādāb*, sg. *adab*).<sup>258</sup>

In *Nahj al-balāgha* we also see much more clearly than in al-Ṣadūq the efforts of al-Raḍī to neutralise the sectarian charge of his material. Al-Raḍī tells us in the introduction to *Nahj al-balāgha* how it was during the course of an earlier work, *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-aʾimma* (intended to be a biography of the twelve imāms, the first section of which thus concerned ‘Alī), that he became inspired to write a book devoted to ‘Alī’s magnificent speech.<sup>259</sup> This is an innocuous enough origin-story the likes of which abound in introductions to Medieval Arabic literature. If, however, we then look to *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-aʾimma* we find a very different narrative of origins. Al-Raḍī tells us how he was taunted by a group of fellow descendants from the seventh imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim who were Wāqifīs (we may perhaps presume severer Wāqifīs) and felt thus compelled to write a work that would affirm his distinctly Imāmī position.<sup>260</sup> The situating of *Nahj al-balāgha*’s mother-text in so pugnaciously sectarian a discourse only reinforces the absence of such sentiments from *Nahj al-balāgha*’s own introduction. Telling us why he entitled the book as he did, al-Raḍī expresses his hope that a book entitled ‘The Peak of Eloquence’ will attract seekers of knowledge, and asserts the benefits that those attracted will find in the art of rhetoric, in asceticism and in the core Muʿtazilī truths of God’s justice and unity, and his transcendence of all created things.<sup>261</sup> *Nahj al-balāgha*’s exclusive focus on ‘Alī, meanwhile, allows it to inhabit a far more neutral space than a book devoted to the twelve imāms.<sup>262</sup> Al-Raḍī closes the introduction by enunciating his attachment to ‘Alī not as Shīʿī devotion but tribal pride in his most illustrious ancestor, encapsulating the sentiment with a line from al-Farazdaq (who was no Shīʿī) ‘Those are my fathers, so gather me alongside them // You who hold the reins, when you bring us together.’<sup>263</sup>

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a move which, as we have seen in *al-Faqīh* (pp. 12-13), usually requires justification (such as convenience or considerations of space) and information on where the studious reader may seek the book’s sources. He does refer to the intense disagreement regarding ‘Alī’s words in his introduction, but this is no caveat or prelude to a solution, rather it is only an explanation for why the same words may appear attributed to ‘Alī in different contexts (al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, p. 18). *Nahj al-balāgha* sits quite comfortably among several *adab* compendia of an expressly Imāmī colour written by Imāmīs in the later Buwayhid period, most distinguished amongst them the *Ghurār al-fawāʾid* of al-Raḍī’s brother al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and the *Nathr al-durr* of Maṣṣūr b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ābī. Zaydī Shīʿīs were also composing *adab* literature with a sectarian colour, for instance the *al-Maḥāsīn waʾl-masāwī* of Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Bayhaqī (d. early fourth/tenth century) (see below).

<sup>258</sup> Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, p. 16

<sup>259</sup> Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>260</sup> Al-Raḍī, *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-aʾimma*, p. 25.

<sup>261</sup> Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, p. 19.

<sup>262</sup> This apologetic utility notwithstanding, it is undoubtedly the case that ‘Alī has a particular reputation for eloquence quite beyond that of the other imāms and long before al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (For a brief survey see Qutbuḍḍīn, pp. xvi-xvii). ‘Alī’s centrality to a distinctive Shīʿī wisdom literature is meanwhile noted by Gutas, p. 60.

<sup>263</sup> Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, p. 19.

This very univocal quality sharply distinguishes both *Nahj al-balāgha* and al-Ṣadūq's works from other *adab* compendia. Monothematic or encyclopaedic, *adab* compendia are characterised by a diversity of sources that mirrors the diversity of their contents. The same spirit of curiosity that drives *adab* writers to chronicle Persian customs of divination and the full variety of what has been uttered in verse regarding flowers naturally precludes the limiting of sources to fourteen Arabs of Hāshim, let alone one, rather it demands material from Greek philosophers, ribald poets, Persian kings, witty courtiers and pagan patriarchs, alongside Prophets, theologians, judges and ascetics. 'Wisdom,' said the Prophet, 'Is the lost camel of the believer.' Al-Tawhīdī echoes many forbears in putting this forth as a flagship concept in his *adab* compendium *al-Baṣā'ir*, a concept he invokes to defend the work against detractors who decry its inclusion of disreputable material.<sup>264</sup> Al-Raḍī responds directly to this discrepancy in his introduction. In justification of his defying the conventions of *adab* by restricting his 'glimmers and subtleties' to a single source, he unreservedly declares 'Alī the wellspring of eloquence, the model rhetorician who set out the rules of that art which others ever after follow, and by whose excellence all other early sages are dwarfed. He moreover declares that the unique quality of 'Alī's words from their bearing 'the touch of divine knowledge and the imprint of prophetic speech.'<sup>265</sup> Al-Raḍī is still holding back here, with concepts such as the necessity of the infallible *ḥujja* and the duty to consult his words conspicuous by their absence. Nonetheless, the message is no less Shī'ī thus shorn of doctrinal specifics, and serves to argue with supreme confidence *Nahj al-balāgha*'s reshaping of the *adab* compendium's customary polyphony with a sweeping declaration of hierarchy: only the speech of 'Alī is here because the speech of 'Alī is best.<sup>266</sup>

Though al-Ṣadūq never enunciates this claim in the compendia in question, there can be little doubt that they serve to illustrate the same claim made by al-Raḍī. Whatever edifying curiosities the reader of *adab* is used to read reported from sages and kings past and present, those reported from God's chosen imāms are superior. *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl*, muting sectarian voices and embracing eclecticism of structure and content, court the readership of *adab* literature to show them that the imāms can best it. They do not present arguments of the imāms' superiority or, indeed, their necessity, rather they aim to illustrate it, liberating the imāms from the constraints of law and theology to show their mastery even over the lionised

<sup>264</sup> Al-Tawhīdī, *al-Baṣā'ir wa'l-dhakhā'ir*, p. 13.

<sup>265</sup> Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, p. 16.

<sup>266</sup> No less an *adīb* than al-Jāhiz makes analogous claims of Muḥammad's speech, rooting its supremacy not just in Muḥammad's unique soteriological status but also the rhetorical and aesthetic quality of his speech. See al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa'l-tabyīn*, p. 17.

polymathy that characterised much of Buwayhid literary culture.<sup>267</sup> These books are portraits of omniscience.

## THE LIMITS OF ADAB?

How does this objective affect these books' attempted participation in *adab*? We find al-Ṣadūq in pursuit of his familiar objective of glorifying the *ḥadīth* of the imāms. This objective drives the rendering of these *ḥadīth* collections in the image of *adab* literature, emulating its structures and concerns and dulling the sharper edges of the imāms' *aḥādīth*, but the same objective produces the books' most conspicuous departure from *adab* literature's conventions. Al-Ṣadūq aims to exalt the speech of the imāms, and so it is the speech of the imāms that he presents, nothing else.

This pronounced divergence bids us examine whether or not al-Ṣadūq's attempt to participate in *adab* literature was a success. We cannot, of course, hope to discern whether readers were indeed convinced of the imāms' wisdom by what they read in *al-Khiṣāl* or *ʿIlal*, but we can examine whether these books would indeed have been read as *adab* literature by non-Imāmīs as al-Ṣadūq intended them to be.

The long-term reception of these books, as already remarked at this chapter's opening, paints a grim picture. None of al-Ṣadūq's writings are considered as *adab* literature today, nor have they been for many centuries. Newman has illustrated that his writings declined in popularity even in the Shīʿī world in the centuries after his lifetime, and he has no discernible currency amongst *adab* writers for the remainder of the Abbasid era.<sup>268</sup> This fate moreover contrasts with that of *adab* literature produced by other Buwayhid Imāmīs. Al-Murtaḍā's *Ghurur al-fawā'id* and al-Ābī's *Nathr al-durr*, both written a few decades after al-Ṣadūq, have received continued recognition as *adab* compendia, despite the unmistakable Shīʿī tone of much of their content, and indeed the known Shīʿī identity of their authors. An obvious point of difference to explain this is that both works, despite their unconcealed reverence for the *ḥadīth* of the imāms, accommodate those *aḥādīth*, albeit in pride of place, within the *adab* compendium's usual diversity of voices.<sup>269</sup> It is hard to deny some correlation between this

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<sup>267</sup> Rosenthal, pp. 252-298; Alshaar, pp. 46-48, 69, 77-82.

<sup>268</sup> Newman, 'Recovery', pp. 112-115.

<sup>269</sup> Obvious though it is, this adherence to *adab* literature's usual polyphony is not the only difference separating al-Murtaḍā and al-Ābī from al-Ṣadūq. al-Ābī was only ever famous as a poet, *adīb* and statesman, who made no recognised contribution to Imāmī legal-theological scholarship, and his surviving work *Nathr al-durr* meanwhile introduces itself quite explicitly as an *adab* compendium. Al-



more conventional format and these works' greater long-term recognition as part of the *adab* canon.

This long-term picture is deceptive, however, as it negates the exceptional circumstances of the Buwayhid context in which al-Ṣadūq was writing. We have already seen how Buwayhid rule's increased tolerance to Shī'īs allowed Imāmī legal-theological scholars unprecedented opportunities of interaction with their non-Imāmī counterparts, leaving a great impact on their writings. The subsequent conquest of the region by the vehemently Sunnī Seljuqs saw Imāmīs fleeing the centres of power. The environment in which al-Ṣadūq's writings, with their solidly Imāmī tone, could attain a broad readership thus vanished a few decades after his death.

What, then, can we make of these writings' place and their potential success in their immediate Buwayhid context? Al-Tawḥīdī's citations of al-Ṣadūq in his *al-Ṣadāqa wa'l-ṣadīq* are certainly a positive indication. They do not prove a wide readership, but they do show that reading al-Ṣadūq's books was not inconceivable for the non-Imāmī reader and writer of *adab* literature. Unfortunately we do not have a wider array of citations with which to develop this picture.<sup>270</sup> Instead we must attempt a more precise placing of al-Ṣadūq's compendia by examining the theoretical parameters of *adab* literature in this period. In doing so we may attempt to discern to what extent the nature of these books of al-Ṣadūq, particularly their restricted source material, is or is not to be deemed exceptional in their *adabī* context.

We may begin this examination with a paradigm for the different spirits of *adab* and *ḥadīth* scholarship offered by Khalidī:

While the *Hadīth* scholar of the second or third centuries of Islam was occupied with the collection, assessment and arrangement of his materials for the sake of incorporating them into a system of belief and action, the *adīb* would be more typically occupied in the pursuit of such materials for their own sake and wherever they might lead him. Where a *muhaddīth* would be likely to regard Islam as a complete and completed cultural system, an *adīb* would be more likely to regard Islam as a cultural beginning, a constant invitation to examine the world of man and nature. Where a *Hadīth* scholar might regard knowledge itself as a necessarily circumscribed and even shrinking commodity, an *adīb* might be more inclined to view knowledge as progressing endlessly into the future. And finally, where a *muhaddīth* might

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Murtaḍā, too, though better known for his prodigious legal-theological output, was also recognised from his lifetime as a poet and an anthologist.

<sup>270</sup> This lack of citations can only be exacerbated by al-Ṣadūq's near-exclusive reliance on *aḥādīth*. Al-Tawḥīdī's citations quote Ja'far al-Ṣādiq on al-Ṣadūq's authority, but *aḥādīth* in *adab* contexts are frequently cited without a source. It is therefore quite possible that there exist invisible citations of al-Ṣadūq's works in the record, manifesting only as a quotation from 'Alī or another imām.

consider certain subjects as irrelevant, uncouth or even harmful to the religious life, an *adib* would be more likely to tolerate all knowledge for its potentially aesthetic appeal.<sup>271</sup>

The picture here is very much one of two radically different ethoi. The expansive curiosity of Khalidi's *adab* is clearly opposed to the *ḥadīth* scholar's exclusive endeavour of canonisation, a modelled dichotomy that would decisively exclude al-Ṣadūq's compendia from *adab* literature and thus from any hope of success. In practice, however, this paradigm is illustrative precisely in showing us how what we have already observed of al-Ṣadūq's works profoundly blurs such easy dichotomies. *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl* clearly exhibit in their diverse subject matter an *adab*-like reluctance to circumscribe knowledge, their wilful departure from the systematic explanation of doctrine and admittance of contradictions decisively leaning towards the *adīb*'s open-ended search for knowledge rather than the *ḥadīth* scholar's closed 'system of belief and action.' Yet these compendia meanwhile restrict themselves to the words of the imāms in deference to just such a system. Al-Ṣadūq is nothing if not a *ḥadīth* scholar.

Khalidi goes further in his taxonomy to tentatively distinguish 'secular' *adab* from the 'religious' scholarship of the jurists and theologians.<sup>272</sup> In so doing he joins a number of scholars over the past few decades who have sought to draw attention to the enlightened, 'humanistic' spirit of *adab* and particularly of Buwayhid *adab*. Focussing in particular on the figures of al-Tawḥīdī and al-Miskawayh, these several studies placed emphasis on their suspicion of sectarian polemic, their emphasis on shared humanity above religious difference and their perceived interest in the human subject over the divine will. While the value of this scholarship continues to be acknowledged, the emphasis it has placed on *adab* literature's difference and distance from 'religious' thought has encouraged a vision of *adab* as secular, detached from if not opposed to legal-theological scholarship.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography*, p. 85.

<sup>272</sup> E.g. Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography*, pp. 96-111.

<sup>273</sup> Goodman offers an image of humanism that is both diachronic, stretching from the fourth/tenth to the ninth/fifteenth centuries and beyond, and thoroughly paradigmatic, even ideological, defining it in opposition to distinctly negative manifestations of religiosity and fanaticism. The classic studies of Arkoun and Bergé of al-Miskawayh and al-Tawḥīdī respectively, as well as Kraemer's study of the Buwayhid period in general (Kraemer, *Cultural Revival*), are more restrained, giving detailed examinations of particular trends within Buwayhid thought, such as a focus on the individual, an enfranchising of models of reason and a willingness to overlook differences of religious affiliation, as well as the relationship between these ideas and the Greek philosophical heritage. A more 'sober' image of this dichotomy is presented by Makdisi, who distinguishes humanism, defined as philology and the literary arts, from scholasticism, by which is meant matters of law (p. 2 and passim), in his comparative study of intellectual institutions in the Middle East and Europe from the third/ninth to the seventh/thirteenth centuries. A detailed discussion of the applicability of the term 'humanism' is supplied by Kraemer, 'Preliminary Study'. A specific challenge to the applicability of the term to al-Tawḥīdī and al-Miskawayh is meanwhile presented by Key.

Recently scholarship has challenged this Manichean characterisation. The pedagogical ethos of *adab* in the tenth century and its vision of the cultured man included such virtues as piety, generosity and asceticism that were of just as much interest to legal-theological discourse. Kilpatrick draws attention to figures like ibn Abī Dunyā (d. 208/823), whose works share *adab* literature's concern with the ethical education of the masses and the elite (he was the tutor of several Abbasid princes), but like al-Ṣadūq these teachings are conveyed by a far more limited range of sources (in a given work at least half of his texts will either be or contain *ḥadīth* or Qur'ānic verses).<sup>274</sup> Stefan Sperl, too, has pointed to common conceptual ground and exchange between *adab* and *ḥadīth* scholarship, exploring the understanding and use of the term 'adab' in what became the six canonical Sunnī *ḥadīth* compendia (five of which contain a chapter explicitly dedicated to 'adab'), which he finds to encapsulate very similar goals to those of *adab* compendia, in particular that of 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), who alongside his *adabī* writings was also a Shāfi'ī jurist. Sperl highlights not only the shared pedagogical concern of *adab* and *ḥadīth* scholarship but also 'a similar conception of the edifying power of speech.'<sup>275</sup> He also notes the extensive structural and aesthetic parallels between these Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections and *adab* compendia<sup>276</sup> Alshaar, meanwhile, challenges the religious/secular dichotomy from the other direction, demonstrating how al-Tawḥīdī was not a figure set apart from 'religious' discourse, but rather rests on a polymathy that fully embraced the concerns and texts of legal-theological thought alongside his commitment to philosophical ideas.<sup>277 278</sup>

Rather than two radically opposed types of literature, then, the relationship between *ḥadīth* and *adab* scholarship in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries may rather be understood as 'a continuum covering the vast religio-cultural legacy inherited and codified by classical Arabic letters.'<sup>279</sup> Different works occupy different points along a lengthy axis of exchange. We do see the kind of polarisation evoked by Khalidī in a work like al-Miskawayh's *adab* compendium *al-Ḥikma al-khālida* ('The Eternal Wisdom'), which intimates a radical construction of 'the sage' as transcending any particular parameters of religion or culture, downplaying the idea of Muḥammad's or Islam's supremacy in stark contradistinction to the *ḥadīth* compendium,<sup>280</sup> or in Badī' al-Zamān's *Maqāmāt* wherein we see *adab* literature

<sup>274</sup> See Dietrich, Kilpatrick, 'Adab', p. 55, Kilpatrick & Leder, p. 20.

<sup>275</sup> Sperl, pp. 465-466.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., passim.

<sup>277</sup> Alshaar, pp. 59-98.

<sup>278</sup> Wadad Kadi meanwhile provides a study of al-Tawḥīdī's sectarian dimension.

<sup>279</sup> Sperl, p. 466.

<sup>280</sup> Al-Miskawayh presents the principle text of *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*, the counsels of the ancient Persian sage Awshanj to his king, as the oldest text of wisdom known, dating from just after the great flood. It is central to the work because of its antiquity, the oldest exemplar of a wisdom that is archetypal and eternal (*al-ḥikma al-khālida*), and later examples of that same wisdom, including those examples from

producing a veritable parody of *ḥadīth* discourse.<sup>281</sup> Most *adab* compendia, however, exhibit strong continuities with legal-theological discourse, with the Qur'ān and the words of the Prophet being given pride of place in any chapter. *Adab* compendia frequently contain humorous, perhaps risqué material, but they just as frequently accompany these light-hearted elements with pointed apologies for their inclusion,<sup>282</sup> indicating a continuing, significant resistance among the literati to admitting excessive frivolity to the serious, pious business of education. We may see ibn Abī Dunyā's near-total exclusion of such humorous and eclectic elements in his compendia as only an uncommonly vehement expression of this same sentiment, and such a view must place al-Ṣadūq's *al-Mawā'iz* alongside ibn Abī Dunyā and other more pious *udabā'*.

This variation is not limited to a single axis of 'secular' against 'religious.' *Adab* compendia are moulded to diverse interests of compilers, including pietistic, political, sectarian and philosophical concerns, with corresponding diverse effects on their shape. al-Ṣadūq's works are certainly unusual in an *adab* context on account of their restricting their sources to Imāmī *ḥadīth*, but so too are ibn Abī Dunyā's works with their focus on prophetic *ḥadīth* (as, indeed, is *Nahj al-balāgha* with its restriction to the words of 'Alī). al-Miskawayh's *al-Ḥikma al-khālida* is no less unusual for its emphasis on non-prophetic, non-Qur'ānic source material. Moreover, though *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*'s sources are extremely diverse, their subject matter is restricted to a very stern, abstracted notion of wisdom, while al-Ṣadūq's *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl* use their limited sources to explore a dizzying array of miscellany that is far closer to Khalidī's image of the free exploration of knowledge. al-Māwardī's *Adab al-dunyā wa'l-dīn* is another text that subjects a wider pool of sources than al-Ṣadūq's to a much narrower model of knowledge. al-Māwardī supplies long interjections *in propria persona* between individual texts to delineate and clarify the concepts that they serve to illustrate, a style of compilation quite unlike other such encyclopaedic compendia. The result is a clear effort to manage the eclecticism of the *adab* compendium on behalf of a thoroughly legal-theological (and thoroughly Shāfiʿī) urge to regulate and canonise, one befitting al-Māwardī's place near the heart of Sunnism's political resurgence under the caliph al-Qādir. This is clearly no less a sectarian-minded alteration of the *adab* compendium than al-Ṣadūq's restriction of his

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the mouth of the Prophet Muḥammad, are subsequently appended to it. See al-Miskawayh, *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*, pp. 5-6 and passim. For a discussion of al-Miskawayh's view of prophecy see Arkoun, 315-328.

<sup>281</sup> See Kilito, passim.

<sup>282</sup> Al-Tawḥīdī, ibn Qutayba, vol. i, pp. 3-10; al-Ābī, vol. i, p. 22, Van Gelder, 'Part 1', especially pp. 6 89-95,

explorations of why pruned palm trees don't resprout<sup>283</sup> to what the imāms have to say on the subject.

There is clearly a spacious margin of diversity in *adab* literature in which al-Ṣadūq may be comfortably situated. While we cannot map his reception in Buwayhid literary circles with any accuracy, we can firmly state that his foray into *adab* in the works under discussion does not stand out as especially unusual in its idiosyncrasies, and therefore have no reason to suppose that his effort thereby to address a non-Imāmī audience of literati was not successful.

### HIDDEN PERSUASIONS – *Compilation and Dissimulation*

This apparent success is not the whole story of al-Ṣadūq's participation in *adab*. Al-Ṣadūq is not content for the readers of these works to be won over by the unique quality of the imāms' words that he has convinced them to read, rather this is only one component of a wider strategy to impart Imāmī doctrine to a wider audience.

As is expected, *al-Khiṣāl* includes a chapter devoted to the number twelve. It starts innocuously enough, with a group of Jews asking 'Umar eleven(!) difficult questions to determine the validity of his religion (a stock image that we see repeated in other chapters with a different number of questions). We also learn that there are twelve worlds and twelve seas, the significance of twelve dirhams given to Muḥammad and that there are twelve months in a year.<sup>284</sup> Most chapters, as usual, contain only one report, and almost never more than three. In the middle of this by now familiar eclecticism, however, we find a chapter listing no fewer than forty-five *aḥādīth* declaring that Muḥammad will have twelve rightful successors.<sup>285</sup> The objective of this authorial move is plain enough, but even here al-Ṣadūq is still holding back. None of these forty-five *aḥādīth* name the imāms beyond 'Alī and his two sons, unlike in *Kamāl al-dīn* where al-Ṣadūq produces *aḥādīth* that name all twelve,<sup>286</sup> thus keeping a veneer of impartiality. He does, however, inform his reader at the chapter's close that more information on the subject can be found in *Kamāl al-dīn*.<sup>287</sup> The device here is evident: in amongst *al-Khiṣāl*'s curiosities, its injunctions to piety and its curious, engaging structure, al-Ṣadūq springs on his reader a veritable barrage of proof-texts for the defining claim of Duodeciman Shī'ism. His polemics are not suspended for participation in *adab*, they

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<sup>283</sup> *Ilal*, p. 547.

<sup>284</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, pp. 497-499, 502, 530-531, 534-535.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 509-523.

<sup>286</sup> E.g. *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 371.

<sup>287</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, p. 523.

are concealed, all the more effective as they are thus conveyed to a broader and unsuspecting audience.

This is not an isolated incidence, rather *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl* both are filled with such devices, their engaging whimsy sporadically giving way to sudden, deftly asserted proofs and polemics. *ʿIlal*’s magisterial beginning lays out in a number of chapters the reasons for the foundational realities of the cosmos, from the reason why humanity turned to fire-worship to the angel on whose shoulders the world is balanced to the social habits of animals.<sup>288</sup> The sixth chapter briefly addresses the Qur’ānic motif of how humankind can both rise higher than the angels and sink lower than the beasts, giving the familiar answer that humanity’s combining reason and passion elevates the achievement of those who conquer their passions while further debasing those who fall prey to them. This segues seamlessly into the next chapter which addresses the related question of how Prophets, Messengers and *hujaj* are better than angels. Here, though, the reader is in for a surprise, for the previous chapter’s brief treatment gives way to a sweeping *miʿrāj* narrative, in which Muḥammad in heaven is informed of orders of creation and his place within it, a place that is, indeed, above that of the angels. It is not this detail that takes up the bulk of the narrative, however, rather it is the identity of other beings of a similar status to Muḥammad: the twelve imāms and Fatima. The narrative is addressed to ʿAlī, and Muḥammad tells him how he and his descendants share his exalted status, and how he saw twelve lights bearing the names of the twelve imāms circling God’s throne. The image is certainly as engaging as those of the preceding chapters, but its message is now unmistakably the affirmation of an Imāmī view of the universe.<sup>289</sup>

These instances of hidden doctrine amidst miscellany are far too many to name. They vary considerably in scope and in subtlety. That the sixth quality of ‘Six Qualities the Bearer of Which Shall Enter Paradise,’ is obedience to ‘those who command your affairs’<sup>290</sup> is a rather oblique laying of Shīʿī claims. ‘The Imām has Thirty Distinguishing Marks’ is more open,<sup>291</sup> while the massed evidence of the Prophet’s twelve successors clearly aspires to indisputable proof. *ʿIlal* is similarly variegated. The chapter on why ʿAlī more than once delayed his *ʿaṣr* prayers until after sundown includes several reports in which ʿAlī is prevented from praying at the normal time on more than one occasion for legitimate reasons. In every report, however, what happens next is that the imām repairs the fault by successfully commanding the sun to come back up to that he can pray in the right legal conditions!<sup>292</sup> This account of the power of

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<sup>288</sup> *ʿIlal*, pp. 10-13.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-16.

<sup>290</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, p. 354.

<sup>291</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, pp. 576-578.

<sup>292</sup> *ʿIlal*, pp. 336-338.

the imām, backed up with several reports and multiple *asānīd*, is unmistakably the prevailing message of the chapter. *ʿIlal*’s guiding rubric of causation also lends itself well to polemic, and there occasionally surface in its text pockets of quite systematic argument. The chapter on why it is permissible to combine prayers without cause for dispensation addresses a standard bone of contention between the Imāmīya and other groups. An explanation for the practice is supplied as usual (that the Prophet wished to ease the burden on his community) but this is then supported by a formidable set of proof-texts. Al-Ṣadūq narrate seven reports in total, one of which is supported by two *asānīd*, two of which give no reference to causation but only affirm the practice’s legitimacy, and two of which are narrated from ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās and one from ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar, companions revered by Sunnīs.<sup>293</sup> Similarly, in chapter on the prohibition of praying in black clothing, al-Ṣadūq not only amasses a number of reports to assert and reassert the argument that black is the garment of wrongdoers, but he follows these with a group of traditions in which the Imām seems to endorse the wearing of black, which he then explains is a result of *taqīya*.<sup>294</sup>

Though al-Ṣadūq’s manoeuvres are at their most ambitious in imparting distinctly Imāmī contentions, a more pervasive endeavour in these texts is that of conveying simple exhortations to piety. For all the extravagant encyclopaedism of these works’ contents, one need read no more than a few pages of either to discern that beneath this there lies a fairly homogenous message. This is perhaps clearer in *al-Khiṣāl*, wherein the division by numbers of the books’ many *aḥādīth* does little to obscure the fact disparate chapters discussing ‘the five marks of the believer,’ ‘the four qualities that a believer never lacks’ and, ‘the believer is he in whom are gathered seven qualities,’ are, in fact, made of fairly similar stuff.<sup>295</sup> In *ʿIlal* too, though, the theme of causality is fertile ground for similar kerygmatics. Some chapters do not undertake to explain so much a known phenomenon or ruling but rather a proverbial moral truth, such as that concerning ‘the reason why two men may enter a mosque, one worshipful, one corrupt, and yet when they leave the pious one is corrupted and the corrupt one has become righteous,’ the given reason being given in its single report that the worshipful man was conceited in his worship, whilst the corrupt man lamented his faults.<sup>296</sup> In other cases, the explanation an imām gives can be a diagnosis of a religious difficulty, such as when a man asks ‘Alī why he is unable to perform the night time prayer, receiving the reply that he is fettered by his sins.<sup>297</sup> This prevailing concern for piety over the books’ advertised theme shows neither the efforts at concealment evident in their more polemical content nor its

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<sup>293</sup> *ʿIlal*, pp. 309-310.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 332-334.

<sup>295</sup> *Al-Khiṣāl*, pp. 258-259, 298-299, 385-386.

<sup>296</sup> *ʿIlal*, p. 339.

<sup>297</sup> *ʿIlal*, p. 342.

probative force, but there is still a deception of the reader here, a disjuncture between the instruction offered and the instruction given. The pun in the title of *al-Khiṣāl* perfectly encapsulates this effect. In his preface al-Ṣadūq juxtaposes the word ‘*al-khiṣāl*’ with its dual meaning with the word *a’dād* which unambiguously means ‘numbers.’ Yet we know that the reader searching for information about numbers is destined for disappointment, the numbers in *al-Khiṣāl*’s narrations seldom playing a pivotal role in reports. Rather it is ‘qualities’ that dominate the vast majority of the book’s material, with any given number yielding a list of enumerated virtues and vices the numerical delineation of which does little to obscure their similarity with those of a different number. There can be little doubt that when al-Ṣadūq promises a work concerning ‘The praised numbers and qualities/quantities’ he was aware of the numerological literature this would call to mind for many readers. We may detect a hint of parody, even satire in his so crushing his readers’ expectations, promising the mysteries of numbers only to deliver solid, improving sermons on a numerical theme.

A particularly intricate example of this compiler’s sleight of hand, in which both pietistics and the supremacy of the imāms are combined, is found in a little chapter of *ʿIlal* located in its large section dealing with matters of purity. Alongside chapters detailing the reason why it is preferred in law to keep one’s eyes open why washing one’s face and the reason why some ways of assisting others in their ablutions are discouraged, we find a chapter concerning ‘The reason why people look down while defecating.’<sup>298</sup> This chapter consists of four *aḥādīth*. The first *ḥadīth* furnishes us with the answer to the title question: that God entrusts an angel with the task of bending people’s necks forward, so that they may be shown what emerges from them and whether it is *ḥalāl* or *ḥarām*. The second tradition quotes the words of ‘Alī, ‘I wonder at the son of Adam, that his beginning is a droplet, his ending a corpse, and while he stands between them he is a casket of excrement. God is great.’ This is clearly something of a departure from the original question. We have leapt from the further reaches of miscellany to the familiar, stark asceticism of the first Imām, with matters excremental providing a convenient link. Having served its purpose, however, the title concept is wholly abandoned, and the third tradition passes without any mention of the scatological at all. A man asks Salmān, ‘Who and what are you?’, and receives the reply, ‘As for my beginning and you beginning, it is an unclean droplet, and as for your ending and my ending, it is a putrescent corpse. But when judgment day comes and the scales are set, he is vile whose balance rises, whilst he is noble whose balance falls.’ This is manifestly an elaboration on the words of ‘Alī, again affirming the ephemeral nature of the world, now with the added stress on virtuous actions as the way to transcend this.

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<sup>298</sup> *ʿIlal*, p. 267.



This brings us to the final tradition: ‘A man from amongst the *Mughīrīya* asked Abū ‘Abd Allāh about a matter from the *sunna*, and was told “There is nothing of which any one of the children of Adam has need, save that there avails concerning it a *sunna* from God and His messenger, known to those who know it and unknown to those who know it not.”’

Accepting the challenge, the man asks the Imām about defecation, and Ja‘far naturally meets his request, supplying a pious formula to be uttered at the opportune moment. His interlocutor then remarks as an afterthought on the mystery of this chapter’s title, that at such a moment man is compelled to look upon what issues from him. The Imām again explains the reason, this time at a little more length. This time two angels chide their protégé ‘See, son of Adam, what you laboured over in the world until it passed thus.’

This little sequence reveals al-Ṣadūq as a master of compilation. The chapter starts with an intriguing, outlandish question which might claim the attention of even the most single-minded reader. This is used as a starting point whence the compiler then segues into more serious material, shifting deftly from angels and scatology for a meditation on the radical frailty of the material world. At the close of the chapter title question is then re-invoked, but now it has become not an idle curiosity but a site both of moral reflection and normative practice. The final image is of the imām al-Ṣādiq asserting his supreme knowledge of the law in the face of scepticism, and thus the sovereignty of the Imāmī sources of law. The reader is putty in al-Ṣadūq’s hands as, *ḥadīth* by *ḥadīth*, he leads them to the truth of Imāmī teaching.

We clearly see that the *adab*-like eclecticism of these works is not idle, pedagogy-inhibiting curiosity, but is in fact harnessed by al-Ṣadūq to draw his reader into distinctly Imāmī assertions.<sup>299</sup> The curiosity of the subject matter functions as a lure, and once a reader has embarked on the chapter he can then be drawn to matters more significant. Moreover, al-Ṣadūq elsewhere admits to using precisely such a device. In *Kamāl al-dīn*, following his counterintuitive decision to include stories about the Buddha in a work on the occultation of the Twelfth Imām, he explains that people are drawn to such exotic tales, and it is thus his hope that having been thus attracted to his book they may read the rest of it and so learn the truth of the imām.<sup>300</sup> It is this same device that can be seen, unconfessed, guiding much of *‘Ilal* and *al-Khiṣāl*. We begin to see the real significance of these books’ eccentric form, and of the

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<sup>299</sup> One could argue that a similar device is present in al-Bayhaqī’s *al-Maḥāsin wa’l-masāwī* (‘The Virtues and the Vices’). Al-Bayhaqī list the vices and virtues of myriad entities, some, such as slaves or seeking bounty, being accorded both good and bad aspects, others, such as apostasy, being allotted only one or the other. While the range of subjects is extremely broad, there appear across the compendium a number of entries with a distinctly Shī‘ī, indeed Zaydī colour. We find discussion, for instance, of the horrors of Karbalā’ and the virtues of the Banū Hāshim. See al-Bayhaqī, pp. 55-63. For a discussion of al-Bayhaqī’s work and his religious affiliations see Ceries, pp. 71-101.

<sup>300</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 667-668. See below pp.

participation in *adab* which that form signals. They could not be further than inconsequential miscellanies, just as al-Ṣadūq could not be further from the faceless, artless assembler-tradent. He uses precisely the driving curiosity, diversity and eclecticism of the genre, alongside its capacity to take the imāms' *aḥādīth* to a wide audience, to preach the truths of Imāmism and the truth of the imāms' *aḥādīth* to legion unsuspecting readers. The very concealment within these works of valuable knowledge which, as we observed above, makes them poor reference works for the Imāmī reader such as are lamented by ibn Qūlawayh, is what makes them an effective address to the non-Imāmī reader, who at any moment may find himself being informed that it is impermissible to pray while wearing an iron ring.<sup>301</sup>

We now perceive the intricately disingenuous character of these works' compilation: the reader is lured by novelty and curiosity to injunctions of piety, legal instruction and sectarian polemic, is offered wisdom and knowledge only to be compelled, ultimately, to regard and revere instead the source of that knowledge. Returning to Khalidī's distinction between the *adib* and the *ḥadīth* scholar, the reader is offered the expansive, open world of *adab* only to be commanded with uncompromising religious truth. It is tempting indeed to lapse into moral qualifications of these authorial acts; to decry al-Ṣadūq as perverting the humanistic space of *adab* with falsehood and lies, with sectarian strife and brute polemic. Such judgements would be a mistake when directed from scholarship, but it is, conversely, important to reckon with al-Ṣadūq's deceptions in terms of the moral universe of the *adab* literature in which he conducts them. *Adab* under the Buwayhids was a discourse that was profoundly concerned with morality and human interaction, with truth and sincerity amongst friends. The question of how al-Ṣadūq's acts of compilation appear to that discourse is a serious one, and it is to this question that we shall now turn, attempting in so doing to give a complete answer to the question of how and to what extent these compendia of Imāmī *ḥadīth* may be considered *adab*.

#### MANNERED DECEPTIONS - *Ṣadūqa and Taqīya*

Among al-Mufīd's many criticisms of al-Ṣadūq in *Taṣḥīḥ* is an objection to the latter's pronouncements on *taqīya*. This is, perhaps, unsurprising, for al-Ṣadūq's treatment of the subject in *al-I'tiqādāt* is strikingly absolute: 'Our belief regarding *taqīya* is that it is obligatory, and the station of one who neglects it is that of one who neglects prayer.'<sup>302</sup> Al-Mufīd, predictably, softens the blow, adding conditions and nuance to the effect that *taqīya* is only

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<sup>301</sup> *Ilal*, p. 334.

<sup>302</sup> *Al-I'tiqādāt*, p. 110.

obligatory to the extent that revealing one's true position would incur imminent harm from hostile non-Imāmīs.<sup>303</sup> His is the familiar voice of Buwayhid Imāmism, while al-Ṣadūq seems in this instance to be channelling a starkly pre-Buwayhid kind of Imāmism, hunted, exclusivist and hostile.<sup>304</sup> It behoves us to be mindful of his stated position as we consider his engagements with *adab*, to consider the diligence and ingenuity with which he manipulates his non-Imāmī readers in light of this stark rupture in integrity which he states must divide the Imāmī from his fellow Muslims.

While al-Mufīd takes technical exception to al-Ṣadūq's definition of *taqīya*, in *adab* it confronts an opposition that is far fiercer. A common theme in *adab* writings is the celebration of sincere discourse amongst friends, the liar and the deceiver receiving repeated censure.<sup>305</sup> Hostility to *taqīya* does not end at such moral opposition, however, for there also emerges a sense that such deception is the very antithesis not only of the ethos that *adab* literature seeks to promote but of the very mode of discourse in which it operates.

Such an existential opposition to *taqīya* is a fundamental aspect of the vision of *adab* presented in Salah Natij's illuminating analysis of al-Tawḥīdī's *al-Imtā' wa 'l-mu'ānasa*. Natij describes al-Tawḥīdī's construction and sacralisation of safe, honest speech amongst equals (or rather men who have agreed to treat one another as equals regardless of differences in status) as the *sine qua non* of valuable intellectual exchange, of meaningful, cultured interaction, of *adab*. Truly valuable speech is the cathartic, uninhibited expression of the cultured self, unburdened by such hurdles of secrecy.<sup>306</sup> Natij singles out the idea and practice of *taqīya* as quite inimical to this ideal of *adab*. If true conversation relies on radical openness and assumed equality, then dissimulation, with its assumption of hostility as aspiration to manipulate and deceive, must be profoundly destructive to such conversation. Alshaar similarly points to how al-Tawḥīdī as well as the vizier ibn Sa'dān emphasised the need for equality in cultured discourse, contending the suspension of the protocols and imbalances of power that usually dominated court settings. True understanding was to be reached between peers, peers whose discourse was free of fear and self-censorship, indeed of the need to dissimilate.<sup>307</sup>

In light of such an assessment, al-Ṣadūq's compendia appear as a deeply subversive and invasive presence in *adab* discourse. Their efforts to inform and persuade the reader without the reader's consent, enacting proofs and polemics quite foreign to the genre which they mimic is surely the very antithesis of the ethos propounded by *udabā'* like al-Tawḥīdī. On the one

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<sup>303</sup> Al-Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥ*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>304</sup> Bar-Asher, pp. 82-86.

<sup>305</sup> Alshaar, pp. 158-186 and passim; Mottahedeh, pp. 41-62.

<sup>306</sup> Natij, p. 247.

<sup>307</sup> Alshaar, p. 94.

hand we have seen how *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl*’s participation in *adab* is far deeper and more intricate than mere surface structure, but now that same depth of participation appears as a violation, an entry under false pretences and with sinister motives utterly anathema to *adab*’s guiding spirit.

Yet Natij’s paradigm is not the whole story, nor are deception and manipulation of the reader are such alien endeavours to *adab* as al-Tawḥīdī’s calls for parity suggest. Another titan of *adab*, the judge and courtier al-Tanūkhī, introduces his collection of instructive anecdotes *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara* with the following discussion and defence of how the work is structured:

I present what I have written of things long-remembered mingled together with things heard only recently, neither rendered into chapters nor ordered by types. For the book contains reports each one of which merits consideration from several angles. Most of them would appear cold and tiresome were I to spent time arranging, categorising and ordering them. Moreover, when the reader had perused the first item in a chapter, he would then know that those making up the rest of the chapter would be similar to it, such that reading all of them might lessen his enjoyment and stymie his enthusiasm. Lost, too, would be the many gobbets and poems, epistles and proverbs secreted herein.<sup>308</sup>

Here, it seems, is the polar opposite of ibn Qūlawayh. Al-Tanūkhī wholeheartedly advocates a total lack of transparency of structure, his contention being that this will better the reader’s chances of digesting the book’s contents as he should. Ibn Qūlawayh seeks to empower the reader, to create a reference work which readily subjects itself to the reader’s agency, the reader who is assumed to be a sincere seeker of knowledge. Ibn Qūlawayh’s readers know what is good for them, and only need to have it made available by its dutiful custodians. Al-Tanūkhī’s reader, by contrast, is not to be trusted. Al-Tanūkhī takes that same readerly agency to choose what and where to read, so valorised by ibn Qūlawayh, and hamstringing it, replacing benign transparency with an asserting opacity. Al-Tanūkhī affirms the innavigability of his text as the author taking control of the reading process. Without the direction of chapters the reader has no choice but to proceed blindly, trustingly forward and receive what the author chooses to give him.

Al-Tanūkhī shows us the centrality of deceit, and the capacity of deceit to safeguard the author’s control of the reading process, for the pedagogical project that underpins *adab*. In the

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<sup>308</sup> Al-Tanūkhī, vol. i, p. 12. See also al-Ābī, vol. i, pp. 22-23 for a very similar description of such a strategy.

ingenious apology for authorial control with which he opens *Nishwār* we see demarcated the limits of the above vision of convivial transparency. Indeed, this preoccupation with manipulating the reader is, we shall see, of no less central importance in *adab* literature than ideals of trusting camaraderie. In this will to control, moreover, we see a great deal that we recognise from al-Ṣadūq's *taqīya*.

One of the cardinal features of *adab* literature is its concern to entertain and interest the reader as well as to edify and inform. This concern owes much to the social contexts in which *adab* flourished and to which much of it is tailored, instructing readers in the manners of courtly environments where the amusing anecdote or well-placed witticism was an essential component of the courtier's arsenal. The importance of wit and levity in the presence of the ruler is exemplified in the figure of the boon companion (*nadīm*), an important figure at the court whose task was to drink with the ruler and entertain him. In each of the thirty nights recorded in al-Tawḥīdī's *al-Imtā'* the long evening of enlightened scholarly debate in the vizier's presence is concluded by a humorous tale. In written *adab* meanwhile, where the task of ingratiating and improving the ruler was combined with that of bringing culture to the wider reading public, this utility of entertainment is acknowledged not only in the wealth of jokes, curiosities and amusing and intriguing stories that Abbasid *adab* literature offers, but also in texts wherein writers discuss how and why such material is to be used. This ranges to as simple a sentiment as ibn 'Abd Rabbih's omitting *asānīd* in his definitive compendium *al-Iqd al-farīd* lest the reader be bored by them to the elaborate mixtures of humorous and serious material in writers like al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Ābī.<sup>309</sup>

In *Nathr al-durr*, the surviving *adab* compendium of the al-Ābī, we find the *adīb* as we have found others, justifying his mode of compilation:

Perhaps someone will say, why has he not devoted an independent book to jesting, or placed it all at the end, giving it a section of its own after the completion of the serious part? He does not realise that I did this in order to trap the ignorant, that he might come upon some knowledge, and to ensnare the jester, that he might fall upon something serious. If I had devoted a separate section to it and had not mixed jest and earnest in this book, most present-day readers would have gone for that one section and they would have considered the serious parts as something heavy and dull, even something to be avoided and left alone, in spite of its being valuable like gold and pearls.<sup>310</sup>

<sup>309</sup> Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, vol. i, pp. 5-6. See Van Gelder ('Part 1'; 'Part 2').

<sup>310</sup> Translation here supplied by Van Gelder, 'Part 2', p. 170.

As he outlines his strategy to dominate the reader (a strategy very similar to that of al-Tanūkhī) al-Ābī tells us in particular how the structuring of different layers of material serves to force improving material on an unwilling reader. This is not benign encouragement of a well-intentioned but weary seeker of knowledge, rather it is a trap for the unwary: entertainment is the bait, wisdom the hook.

The frivolous reader may go in search of jest and ribaldry, only to be educated against his will in moral decency. The parallel with al-Ṣadūq's reader, whose search for miscellaneous edification leads him to the creeds of the Imāmīya, could not be clearer. What we see in *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl* is an extra layer of hidden instruction secreted beneath the paradigm outlined by al-Tanūkhī and al-Ābī. Whilst they and others like them use the interesting and the entertaining to lead to the edifying and the improving, a device entirely emulated by al-Ṣadūq, in the latter's works this in turn leads the reader to a third body of material, one which may surprise the reader looking for improving wisdom just as much as the reader seeking amusing anecdotes. This is the instruction in the tenets of Imāmī Shī'ism, that the twelve imāms are the only rightful conduits of the Prophet's message, and thus that their reported speech, of which al-Ṣadūq's books are compiled, is the single authentic source of truth.<sup>311</sup> It is a device that is both germane to *adab* literature's patristic impulse to rob readers of agency for their own good, and quite innovative in its reconstituting of that impulse to serve an Imāmī agenda.

What, meanwhile, are we to make of al-Tawhīdī's seemingly disingenuous denouncement of *taqīya*? This apparent simultaneous advocacy of deceit and sincerity is not simple hypocrisy, it points to the multiple audiences that *adab* anticipates. Much of the above casts the writer of *adab* as a potent figure indeed, assuming considerable authority over their readers to direct and control them by means of subterfuge. This is, however, only one half of the conversation, for among the plurality of audiences that *adab* seeks to address there exist those who exert considerable power over the *adīb*, and whom the latter must therefore treat with extreme caution. This is the person of the ruler and of the patron. We have already seen how *adab* literature in the Abbasid period became increasingly concerned with the education of a wide reading public beyond its courtly origins. This did, however, detract from a simultaneous concern to address the political elite, a category of persons who might well be no less in need of education than their subjects, but who are to be feared much more than they, not only for such dramatic retribution as death and banishment but also their more mundane but much more immediate capacity to give or withhold patronage.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> For an illustration of al-Ṣadūq's views on this point see below, Chapter III.

<sup>312</sup> For al-Tawhīdī's endeavours in this arena see Alshaar, pp. 124-131.

The ruler-patron's looming presence augments and complicates the dynamic of subterfuge and deception in the *adab* compendium's address to the reader.<sup>313</sup> Van Gelder observes how the mixing of humorous and serious material in these compendia acquires before the ruler's gaze an aspect of self-preservation: as jest and earnest are juxtaposed and interwoven the boundary between them blurs, and it becomes harder (not least for the modern reader) to tell how sincerely or otherwise material is intended. Hazardous texts are insured against, the compiler reserving the right to cry if pressed, 'But I was only joking!'<sup>314</sup> It is precisely this reality which engenders al-Tawhīdī's dreams of discursive equality, but they remain an ideal to be aspired to in the face of an author-patron relationship that was doomed to be overshadowed by the latter's arbitrary power. Al-Tawhīdī's own miserable perambulations between courts cut an archetypal emblem of that relationship, and of the wretched futility of the author's attempts to confront the patron's unjust dominance.<sup>315</sup>

It is precisely this capacity for ungoverned injustice that makes the stakes of addressing the ruler so high but also makes the attempt to culture him so necessary. In what has been called the clearest exposee of *adab* literature's goals,<sup>316</sup> Ibn Qutayba explains in the introduction to his *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* why, though the text is not a legal manual or theological tract, it still contains great benefit:

The way to God is not a single way, nor is all that is good to be found in praying late into the night, continuous fasting and knowledge of what is licit and prohibited. Rather the ways to God are many, the gates of virtue are wide. For religion to be in order the times must be in order, and for the times to be in order those in power must be in order, and those in power are kept in order – with God's provenance – by guidance and good education.<sup>317</sup>

So it is that not only the *adīb*'s own career but the very existence of good legal-theological scholarship are contingent on the success of the endeavours of *adab*. Power must be coaxed into righteousness, ibn Qutayba states. Later Sunnī tradition will celebrate Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, the unbreakable traditionist who was tortured and imprisoned by al-Ma'mūn's inquisition for refusing to recant the views that ultimately became orthodoxy, as the triumphant embodiment of how legal-theological scholarship ultimately faced down the ruling powers.<sup>318</sup> For ibn

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<sup>313</sup> Highly pertinent to this state of affairs are Mottahedeh's observations regarding the nature of relations to the powerful in Buwayhid society. The emphasis on constructing relationships with rulers and patrons was heavily weighted towards the personal; courting the ruler's generosity and responding to it with grace and gratitude were vital to success. See Mottahedeh (1998), pp. 82-96.

<sup>314</sup> Van Gelder, 'Part 2', p. 174.

<sup>315</sup> For a brief summary of al-Tawhīdī's perambulations see Kraemer, *Cultural Revival*, pp. 212-222.

<sup>316</sup> Gutas, p. 81.

<sup>317</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, vol. i, p. 3.

<sup>318</sup> Turner, pp. 86-104.

Qutayba, however, this is an impossible dream, rather the ruler must be bend not with force and defiance but guileful counsel. The next sentence of his introduction leaves his intentions but thinly veiled:

I have put together these wellsprings of reports (‘*Uyūn al-akhbār*’) as instruction for the one who neglects manners, as a reminder for those with knowledge, as culture for both for people who rule and who are ruled over, and as a relaxation for kings.<sup>319</sup>

One might well be curious of how for all other readers ‘*Uyūn al-akhbār*’ is a stern corrective, whilst being for kings it transmutes to light entertainment. The truth, of course, is that the light entertainment is identical with al-Ābī’s lure, a decoy whereby ibn Qutayba distracts the sultan whilst tricking him into righteousness.<sup>320</sup>

We now see that the fearsome but indispensable task of influencing political power is the apex of *adab* literature’s noble pedagogical calling and also of its capacity to manipulate and to deceive. It is in this objective and its consequences, moreover, that the link between al-Ṣadūq’s endeavours and those of the writer of *adab* literature are at their most profound, complex and conflicted. We see that even al-Ṣadūq’s hidden Imāmī polemics are closely tied to a long-standing concern of *adab* literature to covertly impart instruction to those in power who might take violent exception to being instructed more directly. Where al-Ṣadūq and other *udabā’* differ is in the identity of this fearsome potentate. Al-Ṣadūq’s fear is the fear that drives *taqīya*; fear of an oppressive, non-Imāmī majority from whom the confession of Imāmī identity or Imāmī beliefs may provoke hostility. It is for fear of this misguided majority that the imām hides, and it is that same fear that bids his Shī‘a hide until he returns.<sup>321</sup> As al-Ṣadūq takes the highly unusual step of hiding Imāmī contentions deep within works of *adab* literature, we may be certain that this is motivated by an identical ethos of frightened caution. While the *adīb* fears the sultan, al-Ṣadūq the Imāmī traditionist fears almost everyone. He fears the wider, non-Imāmī reading public just as much as the ruler, who are eminently capable of inflicting damage on him and his community (we need only recall the destruction wrought in the anti-Shī‘ī riots that frequently ravaged Buwayhid Baghdad).<sup>322</sup> He fears sultans and viziers, but he fears too the courtly intellectual culture at the head of which these potentates sit and to which

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<sup>319</sup> Ibn Qutayba, ‘*Uyūn al-akhbār*’, vol. i, p. 3.

<sup>320</sup> As noted above, ‘*Uyūn al-akhbār*’ is one of several *adab* compendia ibn Qutayba wrote, and is marked among them by the breadth of readership to which it aspires, comprising both the literate population at large and the rulers themselves. His *Adab al-kuttāb* ‘Manners for Secretaries,’ as the name suggests, is directed specifically at secretaries, while his *al-Ma‘ārif* offers assistance to courtiers.

<sup>321</sup> While there does appear in al-Ṣadūq’s writing (and many other Shī‘ī discourses) the conceptualisation of need for secrecy as an initiatic concern, demanding that mystic truths be hidden from those not ready to hear them (e.g. below), this is far less common than the prevailing sentiment that *taqīya* and occultation alike are fuelled by fear of oppression. See *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 507-509.

<sup>322</sup> Kennedy, pp. 387-393; Donohue, p. 103, Busse, pp. 429-30; Kraemer, *Cultural Revival*, pp. 39-44.



the majority of *udabā'* belong. We have seen above the evidence that al-Ṣadūq feels compelled as a Shī'ī to self-censor before the Sunnī reader's gaze, but the hostility he faces is derived just as much from his traditionism as his Shī'ism. We should recall that it was on account of the former that ibn 'Abbād banished him, and we meanwhile have ample evidence that the court at Rayy was dominated by the rationalism of Mu'tazilīs and philosophers, by whom traditionism was dismissed as primitive, populist and detrimental to individual enlightenment and the public good.<sup>323</sup> We have seen al-Ṣadūq penetrate *adab* literature with singular alacrity, but that very act of entry ultimately only underscores his status as an outsider.

This identification and fear of power returns us to the roots of al-Ṣadūq's choice of *adab* literature as the vessel for his concealed polemics. *Adab*, representing the standard for the educated establishment, the very stuff of the culture to which the literate classes aspired and which they aimed to acquire, was intimately linked to the aspiration to power. We must recall that the very building blocks of the *adab* compendium are dictated by the genre's intrinsic links to social aspiration: lexicographical information, amusing anecdotes, poetry, tales of moral virtue and gobbets of erudition to impress a courtly soiree. This literature is the perfect conduit for an address to power, a discourse wherein al-Ṣadūq's concealed demands for the rights of the imāms may reach the eyes and ears of the great and the good. It is for this reason that these books of his must mimic *adab* literature as closely as possible, so that they can attain its capacity to influence. Books like *Ilal* and *al-Khiṣāl* assimilate to *adab* literature's forms, content and even effect, but in their intentions they are a Trojan horse, hijacking *adab* literature's aspiration to educate with a mission to proselytize al-Ṣadūq's determinedly, exclusively Imāmī message amongst an overbearing majority who would reject that message.

Al-Ṣadūq's works thus effect the radical, accusing alchemy of identifying his entire non-Imāmī readership with the figure of the irascible sultan. al-Ṣadūq might be accused of violating *adab*, of breaking its consensual, mannered civility with raucous sectarianism. But his true subversion is a moral one, at its greatest not in his polemics' mere presence but in the act of their concealment. In veiling the most fervent heart of his message to the reader, al-Ṣadūq levels at that same reader an accusation that is both utterly rooted in *adab* literature's discourse and a powerful assault thereupon. He merges *adab* literature's conventional fear of the oppressive patron with Shī'ī *taqīya*'s fear of the Sunnī majority, thereby damning the readers of *adab* literature and its writers alike as guilty of the same tyranny as that of the potentates

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<sup>323</sup> Al-Tawḥīdī, *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn*, pp. 166-167. It is noting that al-Ṣadūq's traditionism also differentiates him from the prominent Imāmī *udabā'* of the later Buwayhid period, al-Ābī, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, who all leaned heavily towards the dominant Mu'tazilī thinking of the court and held high office therein. Al-Ābī was Majd al-Dawla's vizier, while al-Raḍī and al-Murtaḍā held in succession the syndicate of the Tālibids of Baghdad.

whom *adab* is supposed to resist. In a uniquely and utterly Shī'ī twist of subversion and introspection, al-Ṣadūq calls out as the oppressors those who posture as the oppressed, making *adab* itself the object of the same fear-induced education by subterfuge that it directs at common ignorance and political power. Al-Ṣadūq, with the insight of the downtrodden, equates political power with intellectual power, in so doing turning *adab*'s moral power against itself.<sup>324</sup>

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### REASON, FRIENDSHIP AND MEANING – *Adab for Imāmīs*

We have argued in the above that, far from being a superficial adoption of certain *adabī* forms and moods, al-Ṣadūq in *Ilal* and *al-Khiṣāl* conducts an immensely sophisticated infiltration of *adab* discourse, both subverting it to the Imāmī cause and in doing so presenting a moral challenge to the hegemonies which would exclude him. The nature of these two works, however, and the profound significance which they our reckoning of al-Ṣadūq, do not mean that elsewhere he does not draw on *adab* as a resource for addressing Imāmī readers, appropriating its forms and ethoi for didactic projects that, though they share an audience, seek to instruct the faithful in a very different manner to the creed and the legal manual, and exploring potential interfaces between Imāmī and *adabī* conceptual frameworks.

The most interesting example of the latter endeavour is to be found in three short, parallel works: *Ṣifāt al-shī'a* ('The Attributes of the Shī'a'), *Faḍā'il al-shī'a* ('The Virtues of the Shī'a') and *Muṣādaqa al-ikhwān* ('Sincerity Amongst Brethren'). We have already had cause to mention the latter work, which has strong resonances of interest with *adab* discourse, but placed alongside the other two it forms an interesting commentary on internal Imāmī debates. A number of scholars have studied the discussion in Imāmī literature, especially Imāmī literature of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, of the question, indeed the problem of

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<sup>324</sup> A further philological dimension to al-Ṣadūq's address to his fellows may be found in the dual meaning of the term *'amma* 'masses; commoners' amongst Shī'īs. Imāmīs of this period use the term to denote non-Shī'īs, with Shī'īs being termed the *'khāṣṣa* ('elite'), but the *'amma* were meanwhile the mass of less educated people whom the community-minded *adīb* hoped to educate. The significance of this overlap is that in the latter sense of 'the common people' *'amma* was deeply derogatory. We may thus see in al-Ṣadūq's appropriation of *adab*'s aspiration to educate the *'amma* ('the common people'), reconceived as an effort to educate the *'amma* ('non-Shī'īs'), a play on the dual meaning of the term amongst Shī'īs and an underscoring its derogatory aspects as generalised across both meanings. For a discussion of the negative connotations of the *'amma* in Buwahid literature see Antoon, pp. 128-132.

Imāmīs and indeed Shī'īs' remaining a small minority within the larger Muslim community, and their attempts to reconcile this with unassailable truth of the Imāmī cause. What was the status of non-Shī'ī Muslims? Why, despite its luminous truth, did Imāmism not command more adherents? If Muḥammad was God's last prophet, how was his mission allowed to be so comparatively unsuccessful, with the majority of the Muslim community having deviated from the true path?<sup>325</sup>

Much of the literature (nearly all of which is *ḥadīth* literature) engaging with these questions is devoted to metaphysical solutions. Both al-Barqī and al-Ṣaffār narrate a voluminous body of material describing how Shī'īs were pre-created as such before even the creation of the world. Their pre-existent souls were created from the light of Muḥammad and his family or from the same special clay, thus distinguishing them from the rest of humankind.<sup>326</sup> As well as reinforcing ideas of the Shī'a as an enlightened few set apart, this projection of sectarian identities onto a pre-existential past removed the potentially wearisome concern that the wider *umma* remained unpersuaded of the truths of Shī'ism. Shī'īs, these texts taught, were ultimately born, not made, and those who did not understand the imāms' truth never would and never could. The Shī'a were to live as a tight-knit minority among a larger Muslim community who were unaware of their special status, interacting with them only when necessary and doing so with both the caution and the inner condescension appropriate for their innately inferior spiritual nature.

Bar-Asher and Newman convincingly link this isolationist outlook and the elaborate cosmology that accompanied it to the hostile environment of the pre-Buwayhid period. Bar-Asher in particular outlines a set of identifying features of pre-Buwayhid Imāmism as exhibited in exegetical writings, amongst which is a virulently hostile attitude to non-Shī'īs.<sup>327</sup> As discussed in Chapter I, the advent of a more tolerant climate with Buwayhid rule facilitated a more open Imāmism that was much more ready to engage intellectually with the wider community, and was correspondingly less invested and less interested in constructing a radically cosmologically distinct identity.

*Muṣādaqa*, *Faḍā'il* and *Ṣifāt* offer a fascinating reflection on this process of change, al-Ṣadūq's perspective drawing both from his significant position at the beginning of the Buwayhid period and from his familiarity with a parallel discourse of enlightened communal solidarity: the extensive *adab* literature on friendship and intellectual brotherhood. The different dynamics of the three works show us al-Ṣadūq's negotiations between these two

<sup>325</sup> For developments of these ideas in the centuries prior to al-Ṣadūq see Dakake, pp. 103-251; Newman, *Formative Period*, pp. 67-93, 174-177, 193-201; Bar Asher, *passim*.

<sup>326</sup> E.g. al-Barqī, vol. i, pp. 226-247. al-Ṣaffār, pp. 27-32.

<sup>327</sup> Newman, *Formative Period*, 67-93; Bar Asher, pp. 71-86.

conceptual worlds and his innovative exploitation of their common ground to reshape Imāmī identity for a different age.

*Faḍā'il al-shī'a* is closest of the three in tone to the discourse of al-Barqī and al-Ṣaffār discussed above. There is little of the cosmological in its pages, but it offers a sober recension of the same message. Most of its comprised *aḥādīth* affirm that the Shī'a are the enlightened community of salvation; to be amongst the lovers of Muḥammad's house is to be among the people of paradise. The words of Muḥammad: 'The one amongst you with his foot most firmly on the path is whosoever is fiercest in his love for my House.' And, 'Love for 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib consumes sins even as fire consumes firewood,' exemplify the driving motif of salvific belonging that underpins this work.<sup>328</sup>

*Ṣifāt al-shī'a*, meanwhile, places the emphasis differently. Though it is far from empty of *aḥādīth* asserting the special soteriological status of the Shī'a of 'Alī, this book undertakes to hold those who would attain that status to a certain standard of behaviour. Muḥammad al-Bāqir addresses his disciple Jābir al-Ju'fī as follows:

Said Abū Ja'far: 'O Jābir, is it enough for one who would be counted amongst the Shī'a to declare his love for us, the House? By God, No-one is amongst our Shī'a save the one who is mindful of God and obeys him, who is known only for modesty and humility, for keeping trust and frequent remembrance of God, for fasting and prayer, for piety towards his parents, for taking care of the poor amongst his neighbours, of the wretched, of debtors and of orphans, for speaking the truth, for reciting the Qur'ān, for holding his tongue from addressing people except with what is good, who is the guarantor of his kinsfolk.'

Jabir replied: 'O son of God's messenger, we know nobody who is as you describe!'<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> *Faḍā'il*, pp. 192-193, 199 (h. 10). Though al-Ṣadūq does not include cosmological material in these books, it is to be found scattered across some of his surviving works, not least *Ilal*, as we have seen above. We moreover see certain titles among his lost works, such as 'The Creation of Man' (*Khalq al-insān*), which may well have explored such material. This, of course, only underscores the significance of his decision to exclude it from the three works discuss here. In al-Barqī's case, meanwhile, while much has been made of the theological content of the cosmological and cosmogonical traditions in *al-Maḥāsin*, it is arguable that his focus here is already on their ethical implications rather than their theological specifics. In the first chapter of the *Kitāb al-ṣafwa* in al-Barqī's *al-Maḥāsin*, for example, the subject of which is God's creation of the believers from his light, of the four *aḥādīth* it contains only two describe the creation of believers from God's light, the other two declaring believers' being infused with God's spirit and being possessed of a non-specific special relationship with God respectively, while all four follow accompany these metaphysical revelations with similar imperatives to treat believers with respect. See al-Barqī, vol. i, pp. 223-224.

<sup>329</sup> *Ṣifāt*, pp. 142-143.

Al-Bāqir continues thereafter, but the reader of *Faḍā'il* has already received a nasty shock. The love that leads to paradise is revealed here as a dauntingly exacting one. The text enacts a muscular transmutation of Shī'ism from a broadly confessional identity (one easily conceived as determined by distant metaphysical events) to an identity predicated on rigorous practice and observance. It is significant that in many of the *aḥādīth* in *Ṣiḥāṭ* the Prophet or Imām speaks not of the qualities of a Shī'ī but those of a believer (*mu'min*). The effect is to further move away from sealed exclusivism to a vision of Shī'ism that is fully comprehensible to the Muslim community at large. As well as reforming Imāmī identity the work's message has obvious apologetic advantages: the Imāmīya are distinguished not by their idiosyncratic beliefs but only by their rigorous piety.

This brings us to *Muṣādaqa al-ikhwān*. This text, a compendium of the Prophet's and imāms' sayings like the other two, can be read as a straightforward ethical work on how Muslims should treat each other. Among its most basic injunctions are al-Ṣādiq's words: 'The Muslim is his fellow Muslim's brother, neither wronging him nor forsaking him,' and those of the Prophet: 'If one of you meets his brother let him greet him and wish him peace. God has blessed the angels with this practice, so do you then as the angels do.'<sup>330</sup> As observed above, this text is substantially similar in tone to a number of *adab* compendia, most notably al-Tawḥīdī's *al-Ṣadāqa wa'l-ṣadīq* which actually cites al-Ṣadūq. *Muṣādaqa* is undoubtedly in conversation with this discourse, a conversation that cannot be totally devoid of the same dynamics of infiltration at work in *Ilal* and *al-Khiṣāl*. The work has equal pertinence, however, to the discourse of *Ṣiḥāṭ* and *Faḍā'il* and thus by extension to that of *al-Maḥāsin* and *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*. To look again at the second *ḥadīth* cited, for an unsuspecting reader 'brother' reads as 'fellow Muslim,' but for a Shī'ī reader it could certainly be understood to refer to one's fellow Shī'ī. Such ambiguity has obvious uses for broadening the work's readership, but for the Shī'ī reader alongside *Ṣiḥāṭ* and *Faḍā'il* it further develops the transformations of *Ṣiḥāṭ*. As a trio these works thus collectively effect the shift of Imāmī from exclusivist, metaphysically idiosyncratic salvationism to an expansive communal ethics which brings belonging to the Shī'a of 'Alī into conversation with the forefront of philosophical speculation on the nature of society.<sup>331</sup>

These works constitute a valuable document of the transition between the pre-Buwayhid and Buwayhid stages of the Imāmīya. Al-Ṣadūq's fluency both in the Imāmī *ḥadīth* tradition and the discourses of courtly literary circles enables his daring perspicacious realisation of the potential overlap between these two very different ideas of community, one from the

<sup>330</sup> *Muṣādaqa*, pp. 252 (h. 2), 266-267 (h. 2).

<sup>331</sup> It should be clarified that this need not entail that the works were intended to be read in sequence or even as a group (though this is not impossible).

Imāmīya's isolationist past and one from their cosmopolitan future. He neither directly invokes either the vision of universal human brotherhood explored by his philosopher contemporaries<sup>332</sup> nor the exclusive, preexistentially determined Shī'ī community of salvation found in al-Barqī's *aḥādīth*, rather he explores through select *ḥadīth* how the former may enrich the latter, imbuing the image of the saved sect with a staunch ethos of ethical commitment. We see in these three works that his relationship with *adab* was not only the challenging negotiation we see in *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl*, rather *adab* could also be a useful resource whose concepts could assist a reconceiving of the Imāmī community's understanding of itself.

A different utilisation of *adab* is found in al-Ṣadūq's *Ma'ānī al-akhbār*, 'The Meanings of Traditions.' Similar in many ways to *ʿIlal*, *Ma'ānī* gathers diverse texts under the rubric of meaning and interpretation. Many of these concern lexicographical questions, with traditions either explaining obscure vocabulary in other texts or containing obscure vocabulary themselves, but many of the 'meanings' discussed are, conversely, conceptual in nature, regarding the different kinds of drunkenness or what the ornament of the afterlife might be.<sup>333</sup> The reason we have not grouped it with *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl* is that despite these structural similarities this is evidently a work written for an Imāmī readership. It opens by placing its contents within a solidly Imāmī conceptual framework, citing Ja'far al-Ṣādiq's words: 'You shall be the most knowledgeable of people when you know the meanings of our speech. A word may shift from meaning to meaning, and one can if one wishes change the meaning of one's speech without lying.' This not only presents as an insider's account of the very *taqīya* deployed in other works, but also addresses the thoroughly Imāmī concern of the polyvalence of the imāms' speech, something that we have seen preoccupy al-Ṣadūq extensively in his legal-theological writings. The second *ḥadīth* of the book, meanwhile, continues in this overtly Imāmī vein: 'Know you, my son, that the stations of the Shī'a are in accordance with their telling of narrations and their knowledge, and that knowledge is the understanding of what they narrate...'<sup>334</sup> This is a book that announces itself unambiguously as addressing Imāmī concerns for Imāmī readers.

What, then, does its address profit from its *adabī* aspects? *Ma'ānī* remains very close in its structures and tone to *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl*. There is the same meandering between topics, the same mixing of pietistic injunctions with points of curiosity with sporadic legal trivia, the same willingness to admit contradictions. This is occasionally punctuated by flashes of vigorously Imāmī discourse (the discussions of the meaning of the imāms' sinlessness or of

<sup>332</sup> See Alshaar, p. 178 and passim; Kraemer, *Cultural Revival*, 103-206; Arkoun, pp. 303-306.

<sup>333</sup> *Ma'ānī*, pp. 315, 280-281.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the significance of Ghadīr Khumm are as densely substantiated and contested as any in al-Ṣadūq's writings),<sup>335</sup> but this is no theological tract. If al-Ṣadūq is, indeed, educating the faithful here, he is still not doing so as he does in *al-Faqīh* or *al-Hidāya*, or, indeed, as ibn Qūlawayh would like him to do. Many chapters of *Ma'ānī* which address the meanings of axial, much-contended theological concepts, concepts such as prophecy (*nubūwa*) and 'Alī's epithet 'Father of Dust' (*abū turāb*) consist only of a single, short *ḥadīth*, further emphasising that this is not a book of rigorous instruction.<sup>336</sup>

This returns us to the book's opening chapter, 'The Reason Wherefore We Named this Book "The Book of the Meanings of Traditions,"' the first two entries of which were cited above. The third and last gives a similar message, 'To understand a single *ḥadīth* is better than narrating a thousand *aḥādīth*. No man amongst you understands until he knows the ambiguities of our speech, and one word from our speech can shift between seventy different meanings, and the key to them all belongs to us.' Particularly in a post-occultation world, this picture of radical hermeneutic uncertainty is a daunting one. We have seen in the previous chapter and will see again how al-Ṣadūq sets considerable store by the interpretation of the imāms' words, preferring it over questions of reliability and *asānīd* as a tool for negotiating with the corpus.<sup>337</sup> Had *Ma'ānī* offered a systematic account of how he does this it would have been an invaluable asset to the previous chapter's analysis, but it does not. We have the meaning of the statement that camels are like devils, the meaning of 'the river of excrement',<sup>338</sup> and other such miscellanea.

What the book instead conveys, by means of the deliberate nuance of its eclectic form, is a compound illustration of how this polyvalence is to be managed. The book's opening *aḥādīth* do not mince their words about the salvific significance of the imāms' speech and its hermeneutic depths, and there are certainly points in the book where the correct meaning of holy speech is asserted with severity. Such moments are the exception, however, and it is the work of *Ma'ānī*'s contents in the main to set a benign face to hermeneutic ambiguity. Above all this is achieved by the same homogenising emphasis on basic piety which infuses *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl*. The meaning of calling blessings (*ṣalāt*) upon the Prophet is given as a reiteration of humanity's primordial covenant of obedience to God; the meaning of 'that which has its roots in the world and its branches in heaven' is a brief votary formula to be recited after prayer; 'the three back-breakers' are interpreted as the man who overestimates his deeds,

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-63.

<sup>336</sup> *Ma'ānī*, pp. 99, 105. For the polemical significance of the epithet Abū Turāb see Kohlberg (1978).

<sup>337</sup> See also Chapter III.

<sup>338</sup> *Ma'ānī*, pp. 56-63, 117-121, 278-279, 284.

forgets his faults and enjoys his own opinions.<sup>340</sup> The presentation of such a body of material as a purported exploration of the numinous semiotic plurality of the imāms' words with which al-Ṣadūq introduces the work gives a powerful, instructive and comforting directive to the Imāmī reader: however profound the imāms' knowledge may be, however inexhaustible a source of meaning their recorded speech, the fundamental requirement of allegiance to them and so to God may always be fulfilled though simple, obedient humility before the divine.

This dynamic of conciliation is further borne out in another theme of *Ma'ānī*'s contents. A regular concern of its chapters is to soften the apparent contents of *aḥādīth* which appear to contain frightening propositions or exacting legal injunctions. In the case of these words of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, for example: 'Whosoever is riding a beast of burden and falls to the ground and dies will enter the fire,' al-Ṣadūq ensures the reader that God is not quite so arbitrarily malicious, that riding beasts of burden is fine and carries no inherent risk of damnation and that this *ḥadīth* is in fact a warning against the unsafe practice of doing so without holding the reins.<sup>342</sup> In another *ḥadīth* Ja'far al-Ṣādiq's disciples are concerned about his declaration that God hates the house in which meat is consumed, not wishing to become vegetarians. Al-Ṣādiq assures them that the consumption of meat referred to was in fact the metaphorical cannibalism of speaking ill of the absent.<sup>343</sup> The Prophet's reported declaration that those who practice cupping during Ramadan have broken their fast is meanwhile furnished with multiple explanations, variously using metaphorical interpretations and lexicographical alternatives, all removing the apparent prohibition.<sup>344</sup>

While *Muṣādaqa*, *Ṣifāt* and *Faḍā'il* take *adab*'s vocabulary to questions of communal identity, in *Ma'ānī* we see al-Ṣadūq putting to work its forms and nuances in the service of the same cultivation of reverence for the imāms' *ḥadīth* that we saw driving his approach to *ḥadīth* criticism in Chapter I. *Ma'ānī*'s assertions of polyvalence and its assembled illustrations that a *ḥadīth*'s contents may not be as they seem reinforce the ethos of agnostic acceptance of the imāms' traditions that al-Ṣadūq constructs in *al-I'tiqādāt* and elsewhere.<sup>345</sup> In *Ma'ānī*, however, unlike the contexts examined in the previous chapter, al-Ṣadūq remains content to illustrate rather than assert. The commands to submit to the *akhbār* that extensively preoccupies some of al-Ṣadūq's other writings is a negligible presence in *Ma'ānī*'s pages. Such commands may be implicit in its text, but they are left implicit, in the face of its far louder message of pietistic conciliation. *Ma'ānī* draws on the hermeneutic possibilities that

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., pp. 100-101, 280, 297.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., p. 334.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>345</sup> See also Chapter III



fuel al-Ṣadūq's traditionist epistemological contentions, but also draws on the hybridity of form and ethical thrust of *adab* literature, combining them to turn ambiguity in *aḥādīth* from something fearsome into a comfort, a point of interest and an exhortation to virtue.

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## CONCLUSION

*Taqiya*, not unlike *adab*, is a difficult concept to study. How, after all, can we study with surety what our authors insist is their prerogative to conceal the truth? Such a study must be predicated on a failure of that prerogative, an assumption that we know our long dead authors well enough to recognise when they are telling the truth and when they are concealing it, as they warn us they are wont to do. Moreover, to acknowledge that the authors whose texts we read really are lying some (if not all!) of the time is a daunting prospect for the scholar of millennium-old intellectual traditions. It is enough of a task to reconstruct our subjects' thoughts in the face of the formidable obstacles of fragmentary evidence, obscure concepts and opaquely partisan witnesses without having to grapple with deliberate obfuscation as well.

Scholarly approaches have, for these reasons amongst others, tended to assume that *taqīya* is not at work in the Imāmī legal theological literature that they study, scholars sharing the assumption we maintained in this chapter and the previous one that when an Imāmī author claims to be writing with the purpose of instructing Imāmī believers that is, in fact, what he is doing, rather than pretending to do so in order to deceive non-Imāmīs. A partial exception to this is Amir-Moezzi, who has hypothesised that the many *aḥādīth* attributed to the imāms in which they refute disciples' claims that they are divine as *taqīya*, and that the imāms in fact did believe themselves divine and only said otherwise to conceal this.<sup>346</sup>

The first of three conclusions to this chapter is that this image of *taqīya* as an hermeneutic and historiographical obstacle – whereby we either ignore it and thus ignore the paramount importance which scholars like al-Ṣadūq accord it or attempt the unwieldy task of reading apparently didactic texts as lies – may be overcome by turning to literary deployments of the

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<sup>346</sup> Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, pp. 125-131 and passim. For a brief historical survey of the theory and practice of *taqīya* amongst Imāmīs see Kohlberg, 'Views on Taqiyya'. More recently, as more texts come to light, a number of studies have shown us empirical evidence of devices used in the writings of Imāmīs and other Shī'ī groups to conceal the true import of certain of their contents from the hostile, non-Shī'ī reader. See Bar-Asher, pp. 107-110; Asatryan.

concept, such as we see in the works of al-Ṣadūq discussed here. By appreciating the literary sophistication of Shīʿī authors (especially compilers), we can move away from a binary of true or untrue. Instead we may scrutinise the nuanced role of concealment, deception and manipulation in these texts' address to the reader. We have seen al-Ṣadūq's texts simultaneously educating and deceiving, entertaining and persuading. He does not evoke the concept of *taqīya* in these works, though in the circumstances this is hardly surprising as such a confession would be self-defeating.<sup>347</sup> It seems, conversely, highly likely that this imperative to deceive that he enunciates so strongly in his creed informs the deeply disingenuous character of his authorial agency across these compilations.

Essential to this understanding of *taqīya* in the context of *adab* literature is observing how familiar it is to this context. The *adab* literature in which al-Ṣadūq participates is entirely, self-consciously used to devices of authorial deception, devices that are deeply rooted in its core objectives of educating the masses and civilising the elite. Curiously, then, far from being a sinister Shīʿī idiosyncrasy, *taqīya* as practiced in *adab* literature is at most only an extra layer of deception, but just as often quite indistinguishable from the dissimulations employed regularly by the most ardently Sunnī of *udabāʾ*. Al-Ṣadūq lures his unsuspecting reader to proofs of the Twelfth Imām, but he lures them too to exhortations to pray at night and information about correct ablution, just as ibn Qutayba seeks to do.

The dexterity with which al-Ṣadūq adopts and adapts the mores of *adab* literature leads us to the second conclusion of this chapter, that many of al-Ṣadūq's writings, though they are compendia of the imāms' *ḥadīth*, are also compendia of *adab*, inextricable from the richness of the broader context of *adab* literature in which this identity places them. It is abundantly clear that we cannot hope to understand these works without acknowledgement of this context, as it is clear, too, that the nature of these works, their form and their content, renders them nonsensical when approached in the same way as a creed or a legal manual. Even as the recognition of these works' true context enables us to understand them, it prompts us, too, to recognise the expertise that created them. The anarchic character of books like *ʿIlal*, *al-Khiṣāl* and *Maʿānī* has played its part in the repeated characterisation of al-Ṣadūq by his contemporaries and successors in the Imāmī theological tradition as a compiler of imperfect rigour. Viewed in his true context, however, al-Ṣadūq could not be less deserving of these

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<sup>347</sup> An exception is the instance in *Kamāl al-dīn* noted above where al-Ṣadūq does acknowledge the function of some texts to entertain the reader and so lure them to more serious material. This exemplar is of great value as evidence in its incontrovertible proof that al-Ṣadūq was fully aware and capable of such a ruse, but *Kamāl al-dīn* is not among al-Ṣadūq's texts that are closest to *adab* literature. We shall see, in turn, in Chapter IV how in the different context of this work, with its determined legal-theological contentions, there is more to this apparent confession of misdirection than meets the eye.

accusations of ineptitude. The compiler we see in the writings studied in this chapter is ingenious, calculating, furtive and masterful.

It is with this vision of al-Ṣadūq in mind that we proceed to the second half of this thesis, in which we will examine his compiler's expertise in greater detail. It is by now apparent that the image of a compendium as artlessly thrown together is quite untenable, rather the arrangement of material, both the importance thereof and its possibilities, was subject to intense and varied speculation by compilers of *adab* and legal-theological literature alike. We have seen authors of the period voice concern that their material should be compiled in order to best meet its objectives, as well as providing detailed explanations of how this should be done. We have seen, too, that al-Ṣadūq and others are quite capable of conducting authorial schemes quite beyond what they openly declare.

Our third conclusion pertains to the Buwayhid period. As has been long established, the Buwayhid period has long been acknowledged as a (if not the) formative period of Imāmī theological and legal scholarship, indeed the birthplace of a true Imāmī school. The works of al-Ṭūsī and al-Mufīd as well as some of those of al-Ṣadūq remained (eventually canonical) staples of Imāmī thought for ever after. But it this was not the only achievement of Buwayhid Imāmism, for Buwayhid Imāmīs did not only write and excel in the fields of law and theology. They also flourished in letters and literature, in poetry and in *adab*, and just as the legal-theological scholars profited from the opportunity to interact with non-Imāmī traditions, so too in Buwayhid Imāmī *adab*, and nowhere more than in al-Ṣadūq, we see an unique inhabiting of Imāmī concerns and concepts within a discourse the majority of whose participants were not Imāmīs. Even as Imāmī legal-theological scholarship was stimulated by Imāmīs' need to justify themselves in the face of others' positions and the skills and concepts that could be adopted from others, we see Imāmī thought invigorated by the challenges and possibilities of an unprecedentedly ecumenical *adab* literature. Here was a chance to explore new ways of speaking truth to power, new ways of negotiating and enacting the Imāmīya's simultaneous superiority and coexistence with the wider *umma*. Here, too, were new avenues through which to discover and assert the supremacy of the imāms, presenting their words to the literate classes as more interesting, more edifying and more aesthetically splendid than those of any other.

In many ways Buwayhid Imāmī *adab*, unlike Buwayhid Imāmī legal-theological developments, did not outlast the environment in which it was created. Though similar minglings of sectarian and literary identities would appear at other moments in history where the political status quo allowed it, these were new experiments and offered no especial homage

to al-Ṣadūq or his fellows.<sup>349</sup> For all their brilliance, al-Ṣadūq's adventures in *adab* did not earn him lasting praise, even though they were not without a significant legacy. Writing at the very start of Buwayhid rule, al-Ṣadūq paved the way for later authors of the period whose efforts would achieve greater recognition, including no less revered a text than *Nahj al-balāgha*. Less tangible but no less important is the credit we must give to al-Ṣadūq and writers like him for the integration of the Imāmīya into the Buwayhid intellectual establishment. His writings offer crucial testament to a rapprochement with power that was far more wide-ranging than what we see of the concessions to Mu'tazilism and the Sunnī *madhhab* effected by al-Mufīd and al-Ṭūsī, a rapprochement without which the latter figures' achievements would have been impossible. Above all, in al-Ṣadūq's writings we see how these different achievements and experiments of Buwayhid Imāmī thought overlapped, in an ongoing, explosively creative struggle to assert the legitimacy of the Imāmīya and the texts on which that legitimacy was built.

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<sup>349</sup> Prominent examples of such moments, none of them accorded the study they are due, are the rule of the Tīmūrids, as seen in figures like the poet ibn Hisām (author of the *Khāvarān nāmāh*) and the writer and preacher Wā'iz Kāshifī (d. 910/1505), and points during early modern Ottoman rule, best exemplified in the work of Fuṣūlī (who, in fact, composed a versified reworking of Kāshifī's martyrology *Rawḍa al-shuhadā*).

## SECTION II

*Reading al-Şadūq*

### III

#### HUJJA –Theology and its Limits in Kitāb al-Tawhīd

#### INTRODUCTION

As its title suggests, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, ‘The Book of God’s Unity,’ relays a great deal of material from the Imāms regarding axial questions of the nature of the divine, a resource for which it has been gratefully perused since its composition, receiving several commentaries, while editions and translations are both published widely. It has also found extensive use amongst scholars seeking information about the theology of al-Ṣadūq, the earlier Imāmīya and the imāms themselves.

Though *al-Tawhīd*’s content is overwhelmingly theological, it is not a creed in which correct beliefs are elucidated for the faithful. We have already encountered two other works of al-Ṣadūq which do fit this description, *al-I’tiqādāt* and the first part of *al-Hidāya*, works to which we will have frequent recourse for comparison over the course of this chapter. Rather in his introduction al-Ṣadūq announces *al-Tawhīd* as an apologetic work, the purpose of which is to refute those who denigrate the Imāmīya as heretically theologically inept, and more specifically those who decry the Imāms’ *akhbār* as theologically unsound.<sup>350</sup> We are already here presented with a caveat: despite being by far al-Ṣadūq’s most extensive surviving engagement with theological questions, *al-Tawhīd* is not straightforwardly a pronouncement of al-Ṣadūq’s own views on these subjects. His focus is not on doctrines that the traditions might help to elucidate, rather it on the traditions themselves, defending them as a source whatever they might be perceived to say. Any given *ḥadīth* in *al-Tawhīd*’s pages therefore does not necessarily reflect the views of the compiler, nor is it there to support them. Our purpose in reading this work cannot thus be to decode al-Ṣadūq’s own theology, though we will often have reference to those other works in which he professes it. Rather we examine here *al-Tawhīd*’s self-professed objective of upholding the legitimacy of the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus.

This approach differs significantly from previous readings of the work, most significantly those of McDermott, Sander and Madelung. All three scholars engage *al-Tawhīd* as a source of al-Ṣadūq’s theology, citing material across the book according to individual reports’ pertinence to particular doctrines, with minimal interest in how material in one part of *al-*

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<sup>350</sup> *Al-Tawhīd*, pp. 21-22.

*Tawhīd* may interact with another. There is a great deal in these studies that will be of use to us in what follows, and they provide invaluable context to the study presented here in the detailed comparison each provides between al-Ṣadūq and his Imāmī and Mu'tazilī contemporaries. We will, nonetheless, also have cause to note where inconsistencies in these studies arise from their reluctance to consider either *al-Tawhīd*'s structure or the implications of its stated objectives.

If *al-Tawhīd* has its limits as a source of al-Ṣadūq's exact theological convictions, it speaks with a brilliant eloquence on his approach *ḥadīth*. The book explosively oversteps its opening sentiments, evolving from a defence of the imāms' *ḥadīth* from theological critique to a thunderous moral and epistemological assault on theological debate, presenting a symphonic manifesto of al-Ṣadūq's traditionism. A glimpse of this may be achieved by briefly looking ahead to the book's very last chapter. Chapter sixty-seven concerns 'The Prohibition of Debate, Argumentation and Posturing with Regard to God,' and amasses a hefty body of traditions unanimously discouraging theological disputation, often in the most absolute, hellfire-evoking of terms.<sup>351</sup> This is clearly a far cry from the dialectic apology which the introduction seems to promise, a first indication both of how this is ultimately a book about *ḥadīth* not about theology and of the transformative bearing that the different part of *al-Tawhīd* exercise on one another, creating a compilation that is far more than the sum of its parts.

*Al-Tawhīd* has much to add to chapter one's examination of al-Ṣadūq's legal-theological context, not least in its overtly addressing itself to a readership of the theologically literate. Though it leaves us little the wiser when it comes to *isnād*-criticism and legal methodology, the sustained and nuanced reflections on the nature and significance of the Imāmī's relationship with the words of the imām that al-Ṣadūq offers in this book are far and away beyond the brief, overtly methodological statements that were surveyed in the first part of this thesis. Nonetheless, *al-Tawhīd* also draws a great deal from the *adabī* context examined in chapter two. The above observation that *al-Tawhīd*'s ending stands at quite some conceptual distance from its beginning points to what we shall see below of the extraordinary linearity of its address to the reader. The extent to which this book builds and develops its arguments based on the reader's passage from beginning to end, from introduction to conclusion, is unique amongst the works surveyed in this thesis. This energetic concern with the reader's experience of the book has a pronounced resonance with what we saw of al-Ṣadūq's negotiations with *adab* in the previous chapter. Meanwhile, *al-Tawhīd* is a text profoundly interested in comparative merits of systematic argument and the aphoristic, pious injunction

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<sup>351</sup> *Al-Tawhīd*, pp. 497-504.

of the individual *ḥadīth*. As such it may be read as much as any of al-Ṣadūq's works as a negotiation between the two contexts discussed in section one.

## OUTLINE OF *AL-TAWHĪD*

Below is the translated table of contents of *al-Tawhīd* (as supplied in the edition referred to throughout). To this are added annotations to demarcate the basic divisions and structures of the text that will be argued and referred to during the course of this chapter. As it is read in what follows, *al-Tawhīd* is principally divided into three sections. In his introduction al-Ṣadūq singles out two erroneous beliefs which the Imāmīya are often falsely accused of holding: belief in God's similarity to created entities (*tashbīh*), the worst excess of which being anthropomorphism, and fatalistic belief in predestination (*jabr*). It is to these two doctrinal areas that the first and third of these three sections are respectively devoted. The exact nature of the second, central section is less immediately clear, and will be discussed presently. This chapter's analysis of the work, meanwhile, will be correspondingly divided into three sections.

### Introduction

1. The Reward of Those Who Declare God's Oneness and of Those Who Know
2. The Oneness of God and the Prohibition Against Likening Him to Created Things (*tashbīh*)
3. The Meanings of 'The One,' 'Declaring Oneness' and 'He Who Declares Oneness'
  4. Exegesis of 'Say He is God the One' (Q112:1)
5. The Meaning of Divine Oneness and Justice ('*adl*')
  6. That He Has no Body nor any Form
  7. That He, Blessed and Exalted, is a Thing
  8. What Has Reached Us Regarding Vision [of God]
9. [God's] Power
10. [God's] Knowledge

### SECTION I – Affirming God's Transcendence (~180 pp.)

In this first section the chapters all assert different aspects of the basic notion that God is unlike any created thing (*tashbīh*). Three main types of chapter are included: those affirming his transcendence in broad terms, those upholding a particular theological concept and those disambiguating Qur'ānic verses that might imply God's similitude to creation.



11. The Attributes of Essence and the Attributes of Actions
12. Exegesis of God's Words, 'All things perish but His face' (Q28:88)
13. Exegesis of God's Words, 'Oh Iblīs, what prevents you from prostrating to what I have made with my hand?' (Q38:75)
14. Exegesis of God's Words, 'A day when a shin is uncovered, and they are called upon to prostrate...' (Q68:42)
15. Exegesis of God's Words, 'God is the light of the heavens and the earth.' (Q24:35)
16. Exegesis of God's Words, 'They have forgotten God, and he has forgotten them.' (Q9:67)
17. Exegesis of God's Words, 'On the Day of Resurrection the whole earth is in his fist, the heavens folded into his right hand.' (Q39:67)
  18. Exegesis of God's Words, 'No! On that Day they shall indeed be cut off from their Lord!' (Q83:15)
19. Exegesis of God's Words, 'And there come your Lord and the Angels, row upon row' (Q89:22)
20. Exegesis of God's Words, 'Do they wait only for God to come to them in the shadows of the clouds with the angels?' (Q2:210)
21. Exegesis of God's Words, 'God despises them.' (Q9:79), 'God holds them in contempt.' (Q2:15), 'They scheme and God schemes, and God is the best of schemers.' (Q3:54)
22. The Meaning of God's Side
23. The Meaning of [God's] Circumference

24. The Meaning of [God's] Eye, [God's] Ear and [God's] Tongue
25. The Meaning of His Words, 'The Jews say that God's hand is withdrawn – bound are their hands, they are accursed for what they say, and His hands are spread wide' (Q5:64)
26. The Meaning of His Pleasure and His Anger
27. The Meaning of His Words, 'And I breathed into him my spirit.' (Q15:29)
28. The Negation of Place, Time, Rest, Motion, Descent, Ascent and Locomotion With Regard to God
29. The Names of God and the Differences Between Their Meanings and the Meanings of the Names of Creatures
30. What is the Qur'ān?
31. The Meaning of, 'In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful'
32. Exegesis of the Letters of the Alphabet
33. Exegesis of the Letters of the Abjad
34. Exegesis of the Letters of the Calls to Prayer
35. Exegesis of Guidance, Error, Providence and Debasement from God
36. Refutation of the Dualists and Zindīqs
37. Refutation of Those Who Say that God is the Third of Three – There is No God but One God
38. Mention of God's Majesty ( *'Azma* )
39. God's Subtlety
40. The Minimum Permissible Level of Knowledge of God's Oneness
41. That He Is Only Known Through Himself
42. Proof of the Transience of the World
43. The *Hadīth* of Dhi'lib
44. The *Hadīth* of Subbukht the Jew
45. The Meaning of 'God be Exalted' (*subhān Allāh*)

## SECTION II – The Mysteries of God's Majesty (~160 pp.)

As noted above, the exact nature of this section is not immediately obvious and will be discussed below (much of its transformative nature is in the content of its chapters, and is not much signposted by their headings). It's departure from Section I is marked at the point where chapters cease to be about matters which concern God's transcendence and enter into more obscure matters: the meanings of names and so on. There is a certain amount of dovetailing between the two for reasons that will be discussed. Nonetheless, the very fact that theologically straightforward chapters are now mixed with other material itself signals a significant shift from what has gone before.

46. The Meaning of ‘God is Greatest’ (*Allāh Akbar*)
47. The Meaning of ‘The First and the Last’ (Q57:3)
48. The Meaning of God’s Words, ‘The Most Compassionate is Seated on the Throne’ (Q20:5)
49. The Meaning of His Words, ‘And his throne was on the water.’ (Q11:7)
50. The Throne and its Attributes
51. That the Throne is Created in Four Parts
52. The Meaning of God’s Words, ‘His seat encompasses the heavens and the earth.’ (Q2:255)
53. God’s Predisposition of his Creation Towards the Declaration of His Oneness
54. *Badā’*
55. Will and Intention
56. Capacity
57. Tribulation and Experience
58. Happiness and Despair
59. The Denial of Free Will and Predestination
60. Decree, Power, Trial, Bounties, Prices and Rewards
61. Infants and God’s Justice with Regard to Them
62. That God Deals with His Servants Only According to Their Best Interests
63. Command, Prohibition, the Promise and the Threat
64. Teaching, Proof, Argument and Guidance
65. Record of the Council of al-Riḍā ‘Alī b. Mūsā With the Scholars of Different Religions and Communities, Such as the Catholicos, The Exiliarch and the Chiefs of the Sabeans, and the hrbdh, and What He

### SECTION III – Free Will and Predestination (~140 pp.)

This third section returns to conventional theology, at least in terms of its subject matter. The second of al-Ṣadūq’s opening concerns, that of free will and predestination, is now addressed. Many of the chapters, like those in Section I, address particular concepts within this area. As will be seen, this apparent similarity of subject matter contrasts with the very different treatment contained within these chapters.

- Told ‘Imrān the Sabeen Regarding *Tawḥīd*  
in the Presence of al-Ma’mūn
66. Record of the Council of al-Riḍā with  
Sulaymān al-Marwazī, the Disputant of  
Khurāsān, in the Presence of al-Ma’mūn
67. Forbidding of Discourse, Argument and  
Posturing with Regard to God

**Chapters 65-66: The councils of al-Riḍā** – These two chapters are, formally speaking, a striking departure from what precedes, constituting long narratives of the imām al-Riḍā’s debates with various interlocutors. Thematically, however, they are integral to the third section, as will be seen.

### 1. TASHBĪH – *Apology and Obfuscation*

The two heresies of *tashbīh* and *jabr* differ to one another in nature, and these differences and the corresponding difference in al-Ṣadūq’s treatment of them is the axis on which the development of *al-Tawḥīd* pivots. The first, *tashbīh*, is the easy question of for all concerned. In sharp contrast to questions of predestination, the charge of anthropomorphism can be countered by a wholesale espousal of the opposite position. By the time al-Ṣadūq is writing, especially within the context of a heavily Mu‘tazilī-leaning Buwayhid court, to espouse *tashbīh* is a relatively fringe position, held only by literalist *ḥashawīya*.<sup>352</sup> While this does, of course, lend an urgency to al-Ṣadūq’s need to position the Imāms’ teachings on the orthodox side of the fence, this urgency is not a troubling one, for *al-Tawḥīd* bears extensive witness to the wealth of traditions available to an tenth-century Imāmī scholar affirming the transcendence of God. As for such traditions as might be more troublesome, al-Ṣadūq has no trouble excluding them (at least for now).

It is in this first section that al-Ṣadūq’ compiling is most fully engaged with the apologetic objectives set out in the introduction. The chapters dealing with *tashbīh* teem with mechanisms and strategies to convince the reader that the *aḥādīth* that he reads are fully in keeping with orthodox theology, without any trace of the heresy and intellectual laughing-stock of anthropomorphism. Our foremost concern as we examine this section will be to identify these compiler’s mechanisms and examine how they work in the text. To begin with a note on his sources, it is a conspicuous feature of this work that it has the most restricted set of sources of any of al-Ṣadūq’s surviving writings. Al-Ṣadūq narrates here only from his most frequently cited and clearly most trusted teachers, figures like Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Mājīlawayh, ‘Alī b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Imrān al-Daqqāq, his father and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad

<sup>352</sup> Kraemer, *Cultural Revival*, pp. 72-73. Significantly, *ḥashw* is listed amongst the intellectual crimes for which al-Ṣadūq and other traditionists were banished by ibn ‘Abbād in the account supplied by al-Tawḥīdī. See al-Tawḥīdī, *Akhḷāq al-wazīrayn*, pp. 166-167.

b. al-Walīd, excluding more eccentric sources, an obvious defensive device, but also excluding Sunnī sources who, though useful in many apologetic situations, have no bearing in a vindication of the Imāmī corpus. A striking absence, meanwhile, regarding sources is that nowhere in *al-Tawhīd* does al-Ṣadūq mount the defence with which he begins *al-I'tiqādāt*: that any tradition ascribed to the imāms that compromises God's oneness is a forgery.<sup>353</sup> Instead, as is so often the case in al-Ṣadūq's work, he suspends this most useful (but most compromising) of rebuttals in his quest for a *ḥadīth* corpus that can be more intact and more sacred.

In the first two chapters of *al-Tawhīd* we already see combined two very different to vindicate the Imāms' *akhbār*. In chapter one, 'The Reward of Those Who Know and Declare God's Oneness',<sup>354</sup> the chapter's title concern is affirmed in thirty-five mostly short, straightforwardly relevant *aḥādīth*: 'God has forbidden to the fire the bodies of those who declare his oneness;' 'O Muḥammad, blessed among your community are those who say there is no god but God, only he, only he, only he.'<sup>355</sup> The result is a specific point clearly made with a self-evidently large body of targeted evidence. In chapter two, '*Tawhīd* and the Refutation of *tashbīh*,' meanwhile, we see something very different. This chapter is the longest in the book, and presents a thundering, at times hymnic assemblage of what appear to be the most powerfully eloquent attestations of monotheism attributed to the Imāms that al-Ṣadūq could find, many of which are of considerable length. To the Imāms 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and 'Alī al-Riḍā in particular there are attributed a rich corpus of sermons and councils, and of these al-Ṣadūq makes extensive use here:

Praise be to God who cannot die, whose wonders are boundless, since each day he is bringing into being new things that had not been before. He it is who has no beginning, such as would share in his glory, nor does he have any offspring such that he might be succeeded or pass away. Thoughts cannot grasp him to apprehend him with fancies or likenesses, nor to eyes see him, such that he would change with their shifting. He it is in whose primacy there is no end, nor is there edge or in his finality. He it is whom no time precedes, whom no age follows, nor does there touch him any excess nor weakness.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> *Al-I'tiqādāt*, p. 30.

<sup>354</sup> Starting a book with a chapter affirming the salvific value of the knowledge it contains is extremely common practice amongst Imāmīs and others in this period. We have already seen its use by al-Ṣaffār, al-Kulaynī and others alongside al-Ṣadūq in chapter one. See above.

<sup>355</sup> *Al-Tawhīd*, pp. 24-25 (ḥḥ. 8, 10).

<sup>356</sup> *Al-Tawhīd*, p. 37.

This is pure kerygma, and indeed, the size and magisterial character of this chapter's traditions gives it so decisive an air that one might be forgiven for wondering whether al-Ṣadūq has already achieved at least half of his stated goals. But decisive it is not, for this only the beginning of the book. The greater part of *al-Tawḥīd*'s text will be taken up, meanwhile, with an approach closer to that of chapter one, offering concise and elucidating of specific points. This may tempt us to forget that chapter two is there with its very different mode of demonstration, weighted less to precision and more to expansive rhetorical force. We should, conversely, remain mindful of its presence as we proceed into the long, meticulous, heavily subdivided apology that follows.

If *al-Tawḥīd* is often taken for a reference work then this must largely be due to this first section, which does, indeed, appear to address the reader in very explicatory tones. We see a long sequence of chapters each of which addresses a particular subsidiary questions to the overall theme of refuting *tashbīḥ*. This encompasses all the textbook queries of the determined transcendentalist: disambiguation of Qur'ānic verses which describe God with such anthropomorphist vocabulary as 'hand' and 'eye', whether God can be seen, the distinction between his essence and his attributes and so on. These chapters often offer a considerable measure of precision, both in their subject matter and their contents. In chapter 7, 'That God is a Thing', we learn that 'He is a thing in the truth of thing-ness, though he has no body or form,' that 'everything which is called a thing is created except God,' and so on. Though this mode of presentation may be of use to the inquiring theologian, we should not forget that al-Ṣadūq's professed goal is not primarily didactic but apologetic. The message of this near-encyclopaedic treatment of questions of *tashbīḥ* is therefore that these are all questions to which the Imāms are wholly, uniquely able to give sound answers. Their demarcated variety affirms, in contrast to the book's opening sermons, that the Imāms do not merely preach the generalities of *tawḥīd*, but effectively, indeed infallibly supply correct knowledge of its various essential corollaries and minutiae. In chapters sixteen to twenty-one we see this comprehensiveness represented as economically as possible, with each chapter only containing a single report, each disambiguating a single Qur'ānic verse, and each expanding the Imāms' depicted capacity for guidance no less for such brevity.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> A separate, more targeted device of apology is also to be found in *al-Tawḥīd*'s opening pages. Chapter five, 'The Meaning of *Tawḥīd* and Justice ('*adl*'), is a clear overture to the Mu'tazilīs whose driving slogan constitutes its title. Little surprise, then, that we find this overture to *tawḥīd* and '*adl*' among the early chapters, all the more conspicuous as we have, of course, already had a chapter on *tawḥīd*. The brief chapter's three traditions begin with one which winningly states that *tawḥīd* and '*adl*' are the foundation of religion, before the next two expand on the concept. Moreover, these narrations all come from outside al-Ṣadūq's usual, select set of sources for *al-Tawḥīd*, indicating that he has gone so far as to sacrifice his usual scrupulousness in this matter in order to include the material necessary for this essential apologetic.

Even as he demonstrates the Imāms' unique and unimpeachable theological acumen, an uncommon feature of *al-Tawhīd* in the context of al-Ṣadūq's other works is that alongside the Imāms' words we regularly encounter al-Ṣadūq's own voice. Far from an invisible compiler, he is forever interjecting *in propria persona* between the traditions, a feature which is inseparable from the work's apologetic purpose. Al-Ṣadūq's interjections in *al-Tawhīd* overwhelmingly serve to interpret and to clarify what he narrates, whenever a tradition might be open to unhelpful, unorthodox readings. Even in the first chapter he takes no chances: for example, following the statement that whomsoever professes the oneness of God shall enter paradise, wine-drinkers and adulterers included, al-Ṣadūq inserts the caveat that in such cases as these they shall be granted the opportunity for repentance, such that they may then enter paradise, thus deflecting potential accusations of excessive, *murji'* faith-based salvationism which this tradition might incur.<sup>358</sup> Whenever the Imāms speak in a slightly more figurative register one can expect to find al-Ṣadūq on hand to keep order. In chapter ten, 'Knowledge,' for example, the Imām tells his interlocutor that God's knowledge is to God as one's hand is to oneself, and al-Ṣadūq steps in to clarify with a much more technical turn of phrase that 'His knowledge is not other than him, indeed it is among the attributes of his essence,' and so forth.<sup>359</sup> Elsewhere, in direct contrast to what we shall see later in *Kamāl al-dīn*, he also steps in as and when he narrates narratives of previous prophets to suppress any elements of the story which might threaten the doctrine of the prophets' sinlessness.<sup>360</sup>

This careful hermeneutical policing has obvious utility for the *al-Tawhīd*'s apologetic purpose, and it furthermore echoes and respond to a particular grievance which al-Ṣadūq voices in his introduction: that the Imāmīya's detractors condemn them for heresy 'On account of those *akhbār* which they find in [Imāmīs'] books, of whose exegesis (*tafsīr*) and meanings (*ma'ānī*) they are ignorant.'<sup>361</sup> Faulty interpretation is a hazard which must be avoided. A further strategy employed to combat this menace may be seen in the frequency with which al-Ṣadūq abbreviates a long *ḥadīth* to give only the section relevant to the chapter in which it is situated, alerting us in an aside to the fact that he has done so. While this is not unknown in his other works, it happens far more often in *al-Tawhīd*, to the point where he even abbreviates to the task at hand traditions sections of which he uses in other parts of the book.<sup>362</sup> Meanwhile the converse tendency exhibited in other works to blithely include lengthy and colourful

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<sup>358</sup> *Al-Tawhīd*, p. 31.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>362</sup> E.g. *ibid.*, pp. 53 (h. 10), 80 (h. 28), 131, 142 (h. 14).

traditions, of which only a small part relates to the matter at hand, is conspicuously absent from *al-Tawḥīd*'s pages.<sup>363</sup>

We thus see in this text an array of strategies whereby al-Ṣadūq exhibits unprecedented care over how his compilation is read. Nonetheless, already in this first section we encounter points where absolute clarity regarding the precise and contentious theological issues under discussion seems an uphill struggle. Chapter eleven, 'The Attributes of Essence and the Attributes of Actions,' is a classic case of a topic which is both highly technical, deeply contested and inextricably connected to a broad set of separate questions. In consecutive *aḥādīth* in this understandably lengthy chapter we learn that God has full knowledge of things before they are created as well as after, that God is light without darkness, life without death and knowledge without ignorance, and that he is only willing insofar as there is something to be willed but he is eternally all-powerful. What we may be seeing here are the limits of the precision which can be attained with compiled *aḥādīth* alone, and accordingly at such times we see al-Ṣadūq adding a further control mechanism: he supplies at the chapter's close a lengthy explanation of the question at hand in his own prose. Here it is apparently not enough to clarify the content of the individual narrations, but a systematic account of the full concept to which they fragmentarily attest is also required. Such summaries are sometimes significantly longer than the remainder of the chapter,<sup>364</sup> and variously employ both the discursive tools of *kalām* ('If it is argued... Then our response is...') and learned citations from a range of sources. Once again, though these banks of prose can be read as instructive treatments of the topics in hand, we must remember that in *al-I'tiqādāt* the same theological question is settled in a handful of lines without a single proof-text, whereas here in *al-Tawḥīd* it follows nineteen diverse *aḥādīth* with the express objective of defending them. The role of such summaries in this work is thus to affirm that they are indeed summaries of those *aḥādīth* to which they are juxtaposed, and that the reasoned theology they expound is identical with the Imāms' teachings as contained, albeit fragmentarily, in those *aḥādīth*.

Al-Ṣadūq thus appears to push to the limit his traditions' capacity to attest to their own orthodoxy, using a range of compiler's tricks alongside line after line of his own prose to show precisely what the *aḥādīth* mean, such that the reader may know the precision with which they are theologically sound. However, this is not the sum of al-Ṣadūq's labours here. There is another side to *al-Tawḥīd*'s text to all these checks and balances, a side which, when examined, indicates that al-Ṣadūq is not simply striving to be as clear as he possibly can. An attentive reading of the book alerts one to the conspicuous absence of a further set of

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<sup>363</sup> See both Chapter II and Chapter IV for frequent illustrations of this tendency in al-Ṣadūq's writing.

<sup>364</sup> E.g. *al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 90-94, 159.



mechanisms, indeed more common mechanisms than those described above, which al-Ṣadūq and other Imāmī scholars in this period employ to produce from disjointed *aḥādīth* the most cogent and complex explanations of orthodoxy.

The first of these is the simple strategy of grouping similar reports. In chapters which are divided according to topic one does, of course, expect all the reports therein to be united by common themes, but it is common practice amongst al-Ṣadūq and his fellows (and, indeed we shall later observe its use elsewhere within *al-Tawḥīd*) to group narrations according to exact similarities in their content.<sup>365</sup> For the vast majority of *al-Tawḥīd*'s text, however, al-Ṣadūq neglects to do this: in chapter nine, 'Power,' for example, a number of *akhbār* address the question of whether or not God can put the universe inside an egg without making the universe smaller or making the egg bigger, but these reports are not all juxtaposed but dispersed across the chapter, mixed with those addressing very different questions.<sup>366</sup>

A second, more labour-intensive feature is the structuring of a chapter's *aḥādīth* so as to simulate the development of an argument through the sequence of material. The most basic form of this is to begin with reports which straightforwardly state the desired position and then to move to those which treat subsidiary aspects of the question or illustrate the truth a little more lengthily colourfully. Once again, as well as in al-Ṣadūq's other works and those of other writers this will also be encountered later on in *al-Tawḥīd*'s own pages.<sup>367</sup> Again, however, this strategy is only an occasional presence in this first half. To return to the example of chapter six, the egg and the universe, not only are the *akhbār* addressing this question not grouped together but they produce different answers. We are told first that just as God can contain within the space of the eyeball all the images of the heavens and the earth that the eye can see, so he can contain the universe within an egg. However, a few reports later the reply seems to be a negative one. 'God,' the Imām says, 'cannot be called lacking in power, and what greater power than of him who could so shrink the universe and so magnify an egg?' The implication is surely that he could not, but the fact that he could do so if only in violation of the enlarging/shrinking clause is testament enough of his omnipotence. The same answer is repeated later, but with several other *akhbār* separating the two, as well as one report which simply answers in the negative, prohibits the attributing of impotence to God and leaves it at that.<sup>368</sup> Overall, one is left with the distinct impression that al-Ṣadūq is taking much less care than he could be to supply a definitive answer to this knotty little problem, indeed to structure

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<sup>365</sup> See below.

<sup>366</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 132-134 (h. 1), 137 (h. 5), 139 (h. 9).

<sup>367</sup> Gleave discusses the use of this compiler's technique in al-Ṣadūq's *al-Faqīh* as well as in al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*. See also Amir-Moezzi & Ansari, p. 154.

<sup>368</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 132-134 (h. 1), 137 (h. 5), 139 (h. 9).

the *aḥādīth* such that they would supply it for him. Far from being an isolated instance, this disordered and occasionally contradictory quality is visible across much of *al-Tawḥīd*'s first section. Often the effect is amplified by the volume of material supplied. Returning to chapter eleven and God's attributes of essence and action, again we find key components scattered with no attempt at grouping. Furthermore, although al-Ṣadūq supplies his long summary, within the chapter's many reports we find many significant terms and concepts of which al-Ṣadūq's summary makes no mention, such as aspects (*nu'ūt*), the flowing (*jary*) of the names of God's attributes amongst his creatures, the notion of 'without asking how' (*bilā kayf*), veils (*ḥijāb*), forms (*ṣūra*), similitudes (*mathal*) and so on. We have observed how the summary serves to clarify the disparity of the *akhbār*, but why not use a smaller, more homogenous sample of *akhbār* (in other chapters al-Ṣadūq is sometimes content to give only a single report!), and so avoid creating the disparity in the first place?

It is clear that there is more at work here than simple explication, indeed the above seems to indicate that alongside al-Ṣadūq's conspicuous efforts to clarify his material he seems simultaneously to be engaged in deliberate obfuscation. Though this seems wildly contradictory, these two aspects of *al-Tawḥīd* in fact work in harmony, together furthering the book's driving apologetic concern. Once more, we must recall that al-Ṣadūq is not preaching to the converted. This is not the place to use the unchallenged authority of the Imāms' *aḥādīth* to explain doctrine to the faithful and answer their questions in depth. Instead the goal is to persuade a potentially quite hostile readership that the Imāms' teachings can answer such questions, justifying their authority as a source of doctrine.

Let us turn to chapter eight, 'What is Said Concerning Vision (of God),' where we find of the more striking instances of divergent material. While most of the chapter's reports deliver the unsurprising message that God is far greater than to be seen, in one *ḥadīth* the Imām declares that believers will, indeed see God on the day of judgement, and moreover cautions his listener not to repeat this information! If the goal of this text were pure instruction such a report could only be deeply counterproductive (it is a curious creed that professes two conflicting beliefs about the same thing), but in the defence of traditions this risqué flirtation with heterodoxy is very useful. Al-Ṣadūq subsequently introduces a set of reports on the theme that vision with the heart is not like vision with the eyes,<sup>369</sup> before inserting his own discussion of how even in *aḥādīth* do seem to suggest that God can be seen, what is meant is this theologically more palatable sense of seeing that is quite unlike physical seeing. Read in sequence, then, the

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., pp. 124-126 (ḥḥ. 16, 17, 20).

chapter first denies that God can be seen, then suddenly suggests that he actually can, before mollifying this contradiction by clarifying that some types of seeing' are not like others.

By taking the reader through this perverse process of disturbance and disambiguation, al-Ṣadūq communicates through his compiled material a powerful and vital message: however strange or troubling a single report of the Imāms may seem, the reader should always be certain that there exists either another report or the discerning power of a scholar which will explain such problems away. Both by such iterations of the sanitizing of heterodox material and more generally by including disordered and diverse material which requires his own summaries, al-Ṣadūq thus extends the apologetic reach of *al-Tawḥīd*'s text far beyond its covers. He purports to show his own reading process as compiler, including not just the clearest reports but ambiguous texts they serve to explain, not only giving the finished product of such summaries that are found in his creeds but also the disparate diversity of texts from which they are constructed. The endeavour of *al-Tawḥīd* is threatened by the potential accusation that however many *aḥādīth* al-Ṣadūq may assemble, he excludes many others which might not have been so agreeable. He does not respond to this threat by arguing his selection qualitatively with discussion of narrators and *asānīd*,<sup>370</sup> rather he engineers the studied disunity of *al-Tawḥīd*'s contents to make his sample look representative. In so doing he attempts to gain a hold on readers' perception of whatsoever unsavoury or conflicting material they may hear reported from the Imāms in the future, suggesting that just as the unwieldy plurality of *al-Tawḥīd*'s contents yields to orthodox readings so too will other unlikely-looking *aḥādīth*. The whole corpus is thus justified metonymically by means of a part of it.

This endeavour to represent the entire body of the Imāms' reported speech may be seen in several other features of *al-Tawḥīd*'s first section. The simplest of these is size. While very large chapters do not much aid with theological clarification (in *al-I'tiqādāt* a single point is almost never backed up by more than one report), they are obviously of great use for al-Ṣadūq's aim to represent the entire corpus. In chapter eight al-Ṣadūq concludes a run of twenty-four narrations with the sentiment that were he to set down all available material on the subject the book would become excessively long!<sup>371</sup> He declares what the reader sees to be a representative sample, a claim that is implicitly echoed across the entire work, buoyed up by other similarly voluminous chapters. Meanwhile, the diversity of ideas which such chapters may contain, as well further shoring up the illusion of comprehensiveness, has additional

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<sup>370</sup> Again we should recall that al-Ṣadūq uses just such a strategy when it suits him in *al-I'tiqādāt*, warning readers that unorthodox-looking *aḥādīth* may be inauthentic. We have discussed in Chapter I how al-Ṣadūq is ambivalent about such assertions, and in the more ambitious context of *al-Tawḥīd* he shows how productively they may be thrown aside.

<sup>371</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 131.

apologetic value. While we can point to the predominantly Mu‘tazilī character of al-Ṣadūq’s native Rayy, *al-Tawḥīd* does not begin as some of his other works do by invoking any particular adversary. The well-travelled al-Ṣadūq was likely to have in mind a diverse readership for his text, and maintaining an element of plurality in the Imāms’ reported words anticipates such diversity and widens the work’s apologetic potential. Any reader, it is hoped, will find something to their liking.

Even as these anarchic elements of *al-Tawḥīd* enable it to mirror the larger body of Imāmī *ḥadīth*, we may now turn back to those devices which impose order on the text, the interjections and the clarifications, and in them, too, see a purpose that is more mimetic than straightforwardly didactic. Though we have listed many a function for these features, it remains true that often they appear awkward and redundant. In chapter twenty-eight, ‘That God is Beyond Time and Space, Motion and Stillness, Descent and Ascent’ the text addresses a fairly basic question of transcendence with which the reader must, by now, be fairly familiar. The Imāms in its many reports are frequently shown in what may be called the ‘idiot ex machina’ scenario, wherein the Imām is asked a proverbially misguided question (‘Where is God?’) which forms the opportunity for him to respond with serene, homiletic rectitude. Though reference is consistently made to the specific notions promised in the title, these resounding paeans to God’s transcendence are very much hewn from the same stuff as those of chapter two, ‘*Tawḥīd* and the Denial of *Tashbīḥ*.’ In the very middle of the chapter (between the tenth and eleventh of twenty-two reports) al-Ṣadūq intervenes, purporting to give ‘the proof (*dalīl*) that God is beyond space.’ The significance of the proof he gives, that God is eternal, all-powerful and so on and thus beyond such limitations, is that it is so thoroughly unnecessary. Even the theological language of al-Ṣadūq’s ‘proof’ has already been supplied by the preceding reports of this chapter and many others. More curious still is that al-Ṣadūq concludes his ‘proof’ by declaring, ‘and the confirmation (*taṣdīq*) of this is as follows,’ that is to say that, contrary to all appearances, his arguments are to be confirmed not by the previous *ahādīth*, which they fully echo, but those which follow, which in turn do not noticeably differ from what precedes. The chapter’s fairly homogenous material is thus inexplicably divided into two, with the second half held up as an explanation of the reasoned truths which the first half, it is said, anticipates.

What we see here is a simulacrum of theology. With his brief interjection al-Ṣadūq insists that the *akhbār* amassed here constitute the development of a systematic argument when in fact they do no such thing. Even as he abstains from getting too theologically specific with the content of his *ahādīth*, on a stylistic level he is conversely labouring to make his text look more theological, more dialectic and more in conformity with the discursive paradigms favoured by traditionism’s detractors than it actually is.

As we have observed, it is perhaps not easy to make compiled *aḥādīth* look like systematic theology. Detailed arguments and taxonomies are not wholly absent from the *aḥādīth*, but nor are they its most familiar traffic, with more common voices by far being those of proverb, parable and aphorism. *Al-Tawḥīd* begins with elegant kerygma, with Imāms who do not answer individual queries but who tell the whole truth, the beautiful truth uninterrupted as it should be told, that is to say beautifully. This is not an image which al-Ṣadūq is easily persuaded to give up. If the triumphant vindication declared by the second chapter's sermons is belied by the long, Byzantine apology that follows, it must also be said that that apology never fully escapes the former's shadow, nor is it meant to escape it. Al-Ṣadūq's intense polemical defence his traditions against the venerable and belligerent discipline of dialectic theology drives those traditions through an extraordinary balancing act, simulating through the *akḥbār* all the polyphonous vagaries of the corpus, even as they simultaneously mimic the precise discursive tropes of *kalām*. In the midst of such dissimulating intricacy the pure aesthetic force of the Imām's sermon provides a welcome stability. For all his many chapters and their many questions, *al-Tawḥīd* often appears a very repetitive book, especially in this first portion, as the Imāms again and again assert in decorated prose the transcendence of God. Al-Ṣadūq goes to a great deal of effort in this first section to answer beyond all doubt any challenge to the theological authenticity of the Imāms' reported words, but complex ingenuity of his labours are forever counterbalanced with a no less deliberate assertion that the answer is simple and self-evident.

## 2. 'AẒMA – *Metaphysical Heights and Hermeneutical Depths*

The identifiable end of the first section comes at the point when *al-Tawḥīd* ceases to be a book which gives a simple answer to a simple question. Around the book's centre, the studied apology in the compiler's voice rapidly vanishes, as we are confronted with a set of chapters which transport the reader to somewhere a great deal more mysterious than encountered thus far. The assertive confirmation of orthodoxy begins to give way, and apology clearly ceases to be the primary objective, if indeed it does not seem actively threatened by this new material. We are informed of such matters as the meanings of the letters of the alphabet, of the meanings of God's many names and of the fact that the heavens are balanced on the back of a rooster, standing on top of a rock which in turn rests on the back of an enormous fish. What is al-Ṣadūq, once the meticulous apologist, trying to do?

This change begins with chapter twenty-nine, 'God's Names and the Difference Between their Meanings and the Meanings of the Names of Created Beings.' Thus advertised the chapter

purports to be another stock question of *tashbīh*, and initially no change is noticeable. However, as the chapter proceeds into the details of God's possessing ninety-nine names, there appears a *ḥadīth* stating that whosoever counts (*aḥṣā*) these names shall enter paradise. Here al-Ṣadūq intervenes, informing the reader that paradise is attained not merely by counting the names, but by attaining understanding of their meanings (*ma'nā*). This would still be unremarkable, were it not followed by a twenty-odd page exegetical odyssey in which al-Ṣadūq undertakes to explain these ninety-nine meanings one by one, drawing on an eclectic mix of tradition, speculation, and lexicography. For some names he offers a simple synonym, such as *khabīr* ('knowing;' 'aware') which he equates to *ʿālim* (which indeed means much the same thing), others have lengthier discussions citing various proof-texts to establish their semantic field, while other names require conceptual clarification (while *ḥayy* means 'alive' this does not entail that God may die). We are still in broadly conventional theological territory (there is not a rooster in sight), but in al-Ṣadūq has embarked on a new direction that will escalate radically over the next few chapters.

In string of similar chapters, first the *basmala* (chapter thirty-one), then the letters of the alphabet, both the *abjad* (chapter thirty-three) and the *mu'jam* (chapter thirty-two) and the phrases of the calls to prayer (chapter thirty-four) are given similarly lengthy interpretations, although this time these are delivered as *aḥādīth* from the Imāms. The effect of these vistas of interpretation is a resounding illustration of the depth of the Imāms' knowledge. The explanation of God's names was a cautious introduction, with al-Ṣadūq providing the explanations and these being thoroughly uncontroversial, grounded in theological reasoning and lexicographical evidence and supported by frequent citations. As well as the obvious shift to deferring the explanations to the Imāms, the topics are also more ambitious. The letters, in particular, signal a move to far more esoteric territory: the assertion of an intrinsic link between the last judgement and the nineteenth through twenty-second letters of the alphabet<sup>372</sup> is clearly a step or two up from adducing exemplars for the lexicographical difference between *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm*.<sup>373</sup> This section builds, as al-Ṣadūq gradually expanding an image of the inspired and inimitable scale of the Imāms' understanding. In chapter thirty-four in which the calls to prayer are interpreted every phrase is expanded into an elaborate set of theological truths. We are beyond reason here, the Imāms' interpretations asserting meanings which no dialectic can confirm or deny, resting only on their inspired authority and so asserting it. The choice of subject is, of course, masterful. The Imāms' knowledge, al-Ṣadūq shows his reader, plumbs the depths of language, speech and interpretation, bringing the very

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<sup>372</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 259.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

letters of the alphabet alive with hidden meaning and enchanting the whole of speech and text in a vast web of signification, one before which any lesser interpreter must be humbled.

An early, pivotal moment of this new section is chapter thirty, ‘The Nature of the Qur’ān.’ It begins with the following narration:

I asked al-Riḍā, “O son of God’s Messenger, tell me of the Qur’ān, is it creator or created?” He replied,

“It is neither creator nor is it created, rather it is the speech of God, exalted and mighty is he.”<sup>374</sup>

This is brave new territory for *al-Tawḥīd*. Confronting no less a question than that which had fuelled the debacle of al-Ma’mūn’s inquisition a century before, and which was still hotly contested, he opens his chapter with an unmistakeable attack both on the teachings of dominant groups and the very premise on which they differ.<sup>375</sup> This once defensive text, al-Ṣadūq announces, is now taking the fight to its opponents in this strange and radical *ḥadīth* of the Imām.

But this is not the start of a sustained theological argument. The notion of a middle ground between a created and an uncreated Qur’ān is not elaborated upon in the *aḥādīth* that follow, rather what is developed is that the Qur’ān, as the speech of God, is quite above such arbitrary speculation as to its nature or its meanings. The eye-catching doctrinal challenge of the first *ḥadīth* is now rendered secondary, and is instead made to fuel a staunch traditionist rebuttal of theological debate in this arena. A subsequent *ḥadīth* re-states the matter to this effect:

I said to Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā b. Ja‘far, “O son of God’s messenger, what say you of the Qur’ān? For there is disagreement among us in this matter, some saying that it is created and others that it is not created.” Said he,

“I do not say as they do in this matter. Rather I say that it is the speech of God.”<sup>376</sup>

At length al-Ṣadūq intervenes in the discussion with some judicious points of lexicography. He explains how statements regarding the Qur’ān’s createdness or otherwise, whilst possibly carrying legitimate meanings, also risk heretical ones. Language here is unreliable, the capacity of words to mean more than one thing making them far too hazardous a tool when the stakes are so high. Alongside strengthening the chapter’s message of the perils of debate, this stress on the ambiguity of language also defends against Mu‘tazilī rebuttals. Some of

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<sup>374</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 244-245 (h. 1).

<sup>375</sup> See Turner, *passim*.

<sup>376</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 246 (h. 5).

*aḥādīth* may seem to contradict their doctrine of the Qur'ān's createdness, but if, as al-Ṣadūq says, 'uncreated' (*ghayr makhḷūq*) can simply mean 'not falsified' then they cannot object. Though this may carry echoes of al-Ṣadūq's earlier cautions, it should not distract from this chapter's new and powerful claims. This new attack on theological disputation, buoyed up by arguments about the labyrinthine nature of meaning, clearly resonates with the previous chapters' illustration of how the key to that labyrinth is the sole prerogative of the Imāms. The alternative to unseemly disputes, al-Ṣadūq declares, is submission to their knowledge.

The daring extent of this attack becomes fully apparent with chapter thirty-eight, 'On God's Majesty' (*'aẓma*).<sup>377</sup> The chapter's assembled *aḥādīth* set out to illustrate the greatness of the divine, and illustrate it does, with all the potential conflict with anti-*tashbīḥ* transcendentalism that the word implies. It brims over with accounts of vast cosmological distances such as those between the curtains of smoke, light and fire which veil the almighty, angels whose wings are covered in many-mouthed faces which forever voice the praises of the Almighty, other angels wondrously assembled of intermingled ice and fire<sup>378</sup> and, of course, the sea of shadows in which swims the fish on whose back is balanced the rock on which stands the colossal rooster on whose back the very heavens are placed. In keeping with the title of the chapter, the appropriately formidable dimensions, such as necks of angels the length of which would take

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<sup>377</sup> Before its climax in chapter thirty-eight this second section makes efforts to legitimise these new hermeneutical horizons and affirm in new registers the supremacy of the imāms' knowledge. In chapters forty-eight through fifty-two, Al-Ṣadūq ends the section with a set of tame exegeses regarding God's throne(s) (*al-'arsh* and *al-kursī*), as mentioned in various Qur'ānic verses, in so doing reminding the reader with impeccable timing that such unknowable concepts demanding interpretation as these are to be found in the Holy Book itself. The most concentrated instance of this device meanwhile comes directly before chapter thirty-eight (*'aẓma*). Chapters thirty-six and thirty-seven, 'The Refutation of Dualists and *Zanādiqa*,' and 'The Refutation of Those Who Claim that God is One Among Three' constitute our first example of what will become a familiar phenomenon in al-Ṣadūq's writings, wherein arguments are appended to mythic dramatizations of the abstract concepts that have been discussed. We shall discuss this as a phenomenon in more detail later on (see below). As an operation in this context, meanwhile, we may observe that before embarking on the axial cosmic extravagance of chapter thirty-eight, al-Ṣadūq shows us the Imāms as defenders against Islam's very nemesis, the very antithesis of *tawḥīd*, the notion that there is more than one God. Our text began with the Imāms asserting *tawḥīd*, but now we see them protecting it against its most perverse and seditious foes. Moreover, in the reports contained within these chapters we have moved from lists of brief reports to sustained narrative, multiple reports being replaced by long, unbroken descriptive prose. We are reminded of the kerygmatic force of chapter two as al-Ṣadūq moves briefly back into a less analytical, more rhetorical register. The chapter against dualists gives several long narratives, in each of which an Imām is confronted by a heretic and defeats them in debate. The chapter against trinitarianism give only a single story, that of an elderly, celebrated patriarch whose sincere desire for truth and the indomitable arguments of the Imām ultimately compel him, reluctantly and in spite of his position, to turn to Islam. The narrative is engaging and detailed, as the patriarch goes back and forth first to the Imām's disciple and then to the Imām himself, meanwhile counselled at home by his wise, Muslim housekeeper. Artfully located as they are, these chapters serve well to further imbue readers on new and powerful registers with the image of the Imām as the embodiment of *tawḥīd*, just as al-Ṣadūq is most in need of their trust.

<sup>378</sup> The angel in question, the *ḥadīth* narrates, prays as follows: 'Glory to God who dulls the heat of this fire lest it melt this ice, and who dulls the chill of this ice lest it extinguishes the heat of this fire. O God, you who unite fire and ice, unite the hearts of the believers, your servants, in obedience to you.' *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 308 (h. 5).



a bird five hundred years to fly,<sup>379</sup> of all of these elements are relayed in detail. God, the chapter tells us, is certainly great. But this, of course, is a fact of which we have already repeatedly made aware. Nearly thirty preceding chapters have told us that God's greatness is beyond description and beyond dimension. Moreover, far beyond the risk of repetition, it is quite apparent that the lurid images of this chapter and the previously affirmed transcendence are dangerously close to contradiction. Surely we have seen here described what we learned previously is not to be described! It is also the case that quite apart from logical and theological objections that rationalists theologians might have to this mode of discourse, the metaphysical circus offered in this chapter seem to flamboyantly challenge the very parameters within which rational theology is conducted.

Here then is the climax of the change of register that al-Ṣadūq enacts in this middle section. Through this fast-escalating turn for the stranger he engineers a transformation of the reader's encounter with the Imāms' speech. Up till now their reported words have expanded, clarified and defended, displaying a comforting conformance to familiar theological truths. But the inspired speech of God's vicegerents is not all so benignly knowable. This eruption of the unfamiliar is a shift from defence to aggression, as the Imāms burst out of *kalām*'s discursive box and command the reader to do the same. Al-Ṣadūq has nailed his traditionist colours to the mast, unveiling his Imāms and their *akhbār* as the single, perfect source of sacred knowledge, knowledge which is quite beyond the degraded quibblings to which *al-Tawḥīd* began as a response.

There is no doubt that al-Ṣadūq is running a serious risk here. His declaring the Imāms to be beyond *kalām* must look perilously close to simply condemning their teachings as contradictory to *kalām*, utterly subverting the apology of the first section. But high though the stakes may be, he cannot be accused of having neglected to take precautions. Even as the middle section speeds away from the apologetic quietism of the first, it can only succeed in what follows by leaning heavily on the crutch of legitimacy and credibility, of unimpeachable orthodoxy that the first section provides. Al-Ṣadūq is counting on the fact that, after over two hundred pages, his readers now trust the Imāms and trust that transcendence is at the heart of the Imāms' teachings, before springing on them this new and startling set of images. That al-Ṣadūq's own voice was affirming orthodoxy alongside the Imām tells readers that their compiler, too, is trustworthy, encouraging them to give him the benefit of the doubt. If the first section at times felt repetitive, this was in necessary anticipation of surprises to come.

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<sup>379</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 309 (h. 8).

For all the mimetic force and novelty of the central section's *aḥādīth*, al-Ṣadūq interjects *in propria persona* in chapter forty-one, 'That God Cannot Be Known Save Through Himself,' to condense it into a sober and simple theological point. Following the *aḥādīth*'s straightforward confirmation of the title contention, al-Ṣadūq steps in to specifically deny knowledge of God to a hitherto unmentioned entity: reason ('*aql*').<sup>380</sup> Al-Ṣadūq specifically contemplates the 'Ḥayy b. Yaḡzān' scenario of the man grows up in complete isolation and infers the central truths of religion from reasoned observation of nature,<sup>381</sup> and declares that this is impossible (unless, of course, that man receives divine inspiration). The only way to God, al-Ṣadūq now spells out to us, is through the conduit of revelation, revelation that is embodied, of course, in the words of the Imāms.

The significance of this is that not only has al-Ṣadūq now reshaped the work into so firmly traditionist a mould, but that after forty chapters of by turns mimicking and mocking theology, he has at last outlined a distinct theological position. He tells his readers what he has first shown them: the Imāms manifest their unique knowledge of unknowable and, indeed, unreasonable things, battering the readers' comprehension with shocks, impossibilities and wonders, and only afterwards does al-Ṣadūq confirm that their reasoning is not, in fact, required. Theology such as the Mu'tazilīs practice it is repudiated as misguided and unnecessary: the Imāms' traditions have shown first that they have no need of it and then that they go beyond it.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> '*Aql* has received a number of translations among scholars of Shī'ism, ranging from 'the intellect' to 'hiero-intelligence,' while 'reason' is usually avoided (See Amir-Moezzi *Divine Guide*, pp. 6-13). Another proponent of this conception of Shī'ī uses of the term is to be found in Crow). This seems based in a notion that '*aql* in Shī'ī thought constituted something more than cold rationality, as well as its presence in highly traditionist sources such as *al-Kāfī* in which one does not expect sanctions of independent reasoning (See especially al-Kulaynī, vol. i, pp. 10-29). In al-Ṣadūq's usage here, conversely, '*aql* clearly refers to reason conceived as the faculty at work in independent reasoning and analogy, hubristic challenges to the authority of text to which al-Ṣadūq was firmly opposed.

<sup>381</sup> This is not to claim any influence of ibn Ṭufayl's work by the same name on al-Ṣadūq, the former having only been written many decades later.

<sup>382</sup> It is Madelung who characterises *al-Tawḥīd* as an attempt to minimise disagreement with the Mu'tazilīs, though he does point out some areas where al-Ṣadūq diverges from Mu'tazilī positions. He does not, however, acknowledge the full extent to which the book, having worked hard to appease a Mu'tazilī readership in the first section, emphatically changes direction in the middle as described above. Similarly, McDermott describes al-Ṣadūq's preference to discourage controversy, noting his strong words on *taqīya* in *al-I'tiqādāt* and a number of conciliatory theological positions expressed in his works. We have seen this diplomatic side of al-Ṣadūq at work in the previous chapter of this thesis as well as in earlier sections of *al-Tawḥīd*. It is significant that neither author engages this combative aspect of *al-Tawḥīd* that is so vehemently adopted in the later chapters of the book, as it bears full witness to the perils of failing to acknowledge the integrity of such a composition, even to the point of measuring different chapters against the objectives stated in the introduction. Neither scholar engages chapter thirty-two or those that surround it. See Madelung, 'Imāmism', pp. 17-19, McDermott, pp. 315-322.

### 3. JABR - *The Ethical Climax*

A remarkable feature of *al-Tawḥīd*'s composition is that al-Ṣadūq does not perform this transition from apologetic to polemic at the end of the book, rather he does it half way through. More specifically, at this point there still remains the second of the two doctrines from which at the start he set out to disassociate the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus: that of *jabr*. Al-Ṣadūq's treatment of this doctrine is a remarkable development from the edifice constructed in the previous section, tapping the explosive panache of its revealed wonders to fuel a sustained and nuanced study of how one should be guided by the Imāms' *akhbār* in the face of difficult theological questions.

Chapter fifty-four, '*Badā*' decisively informs the reader that we are back in theological waters, and treacherous theological waters at that. The declared subject matter is one of the most troublesome theological bogeymen of the Imāmīya in this period. *Badā*' most commonly refers to the idea that God can change his mind, an idea that met with horror and ridicule among theologians and especially among Mu'tazilīs. While later narratives associating this doctrine with moments in early Shī'ī history are hard to verify, it is clear that by al-Ṣadūq's time the doctrine is firmly associated with the Imāmīya. This association is embodied in a quantity of *aḥādīth* in which the imāms discuss *badā*', a corpus that thus presents a serious hurdle to al-Ṣadūq's efforts of defending Imāmī *ḥadīth*. Far from the relative ease with which al-Ṣadūq was able to put *tashbīh* related concerns to rest, he now faces a highly contentious doctrine which, in the particular damage it does to the credibility of the Imāmīya and their traditions, demands a response.<sup>383</sup>

The turn to so troublesome a theological topic after the assault on theology enacted in the previous chapters is a provocative gesture. Having apparently signalled a triumphant end to

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<sup>383</sup> See McDermott, pp. 329-33. *Badā*' was reportedly first invoked by al-Mukhtār in the seventh century, to explain the loss of battles in which he had told his followers in advance that God had promised them victory. While undoubtedly contentious amongst theological circles from its inception, the idea has a clear persistence in Shī'ī and later Imāmī circles. The second *locus classicus* of the doctrine is the death of Ismā'īl the son of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who is widely narrated to have been designated by al-Ṣādiq as his successor before unfortunately predeceasing him. Thus told the story casts obvious doubt on al-Ṣādiq's inspired knowledge and the divine provenance of his office. If the Imāms are appointed by God's will (let alone marked as such since the dawn of creation), how could al-Ṣādiq make such a clear error in appointing a successor? One answer proffered was, once again, *badā*': God simply changed his mind. al-Mufīd laments in *Taṣḥīḥ* (p. 50) that when it comes to *badā*' the Imāmīs are slaves to traditions. In this complaint we see a theologian who has minimal tolerance for the concept of *badā*' acknowledging its tenacious presence in the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus. Al-Ṣadūq, meanwhile, makes the analogous but tellingly different comment, '*badā*' is not as the ignorant think it to be.' Like al-Mufīd, he is troubled and defensive regarding the perception of this stubbornly Imāmī doctrine, but unlike al-Mufīd, he blames its woes not on thoughtless following of the *aḥādīth* but on ignorance, including (so the previous discussion makes plain) ignorance of those same *ḥadīth*.

theological argument in the middle section, he begins this new one with what seems and urgent need for it. Rather than representing a retreat, however, he boldly choses this most controversial issue to demonstrate precisely how the supremacy of tradition over argument works in practice, achieving this by the compiler's arts of selection and arrangement.<sup>384</sup> To see this we must proceed through the chapter in some detail.

Al-Ṣadūq begins with a pair of reports declaring that God 'never before has been worshipped/glorified with something like *badā'*.' In so doing he brings the subject to the table with some very useful ambiguities. *Badā'*, we learn, is unique, mysterious, an unprecedented phenomenon concerning which we rush to judgement at our peril. Moreover, while the stronger implication of the traditions is an affirmation of *badā'*, inasmuch as God is worshipped therewith now (and certainly settles on that meaning in light of what follows), it could at this stage also constitute a disavowal of the concept. All we know for certain at this point is that the Imāms understand *badā'* and we don't. Thus we read on.

In the next two traditions the word *badā'* itself is absent. What they each affirm confidently is that God can alter his creation, postponing and hastening, confirming and erasing, the second tradition shoring up this inoffensive truth with a Qur'ānic verse. The implication, though left implicit, is clear: that it is this capacity to instigate change to which *badā'* refers. This sets the scene for the fifth and sixth reports in which *badā'* is fully instated as indispensable creed. No prophet has neglected to preach this doctrine, standing as it does alongside such foundational notions as the prohibition of wine and prostration to God.

'If people only knew,' preaches the next reports, 'The rewards of affirming *badā'*, they would not shrink from attesting to it.' Again, if the reader is perturbed by these wholehearted endorsements of the concept, she is reminded that this is down do flawed understanding. A vital blow is then struck in the eighth tradition, which denies unequivocally that there can be any deficiency of God's knowledge of unfolding events. Nothing can surprise him, for he knows totally the past the present and the future. The conceptual threat of the doctrine's founding instances, that the failures of al-Mukhtār or the death of Ismā'īl were somehow unanticipated or unplanned, it now firmly disavowed.

The ninth report serves to affirm the two principle facts that we have now learned: firstly, that *badā'*, far from denigrating God's knowledge, concerns the complete extent to which that knowledge and power subsumes the ever-changing face of creation, and second, that it is thus an obscure and difficult concept the understanding of which we should thus defer to those who

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<sup>384</sup> It should not go unremarked that the meticulous dexterity with which al-Ṣadūq here orders his material, tradition by tradition, is exactly the explicatory precision the absence of which was so conspicuous in the first section.

know. The report gives a formidable taxonomy of the different components of God's power and knowledge and their relation to created things, including *badā'*'s place therein. Tellingly, the details of this taxonomy are not reiterated either in al-Ṣadūq's closing summary or in his discussion of *badā'* in his discussion for *badā'* in *al-I'tiqādāt*. These details are not essential points of Imāmī doctrine, rather they are an instance of the rhetorical aspect of the Imāms' compiled traditions that we have seen so often in *al-Tawḥīd*. The essential difficulties of *badā'* have been resolved at this point, and this lengthiest tradition of the chapter has its principle goal not in expanding the definitive picture of *badā'* but of reaffirming the image of the Imāms' unparalleled understanding and thus the necessity of deference thereto.

Al-Ṣadūq now steps in to contribute his own summary. Quite unlike the largely cosmetic summaries of the first section, here al-Ṣadūq adds to the message received from the *aḥādīth* with a highly focussed authorial address of a specific issue: a problematic ḥadīth, that in which al-Ṣādiq appears to evoke *badā'* with regard to his son Ismā'īl's death. The most widely reported core of the *ḥadīth* is the Imām saying, 'There never was unto God an instance of *badā'* as there was regarding Ismā'īl.'<sup>385</sup> The text is particularly difficult as it seems to describe *badā'* as something of which God is on the receiving end. Al-Ṣadūq's response is to unleash what is in his extant writings an almost uniquely concentrated effort of suppression of these problematic implications. In just a few lines he blasts the problem text with potential different versions, mitigating context (for example the suggestion that al-Ṣādiq was talking about his father Ismā'īl the son of Abraham), and lexicographical acrobatics. The result is sound enough, though would be much weakened were it not able to draw credibility from the preceding bulk of the chapter.

Though the management of this worrisome concept certainly has an apologetic function, the force of this chapter's argument is a long way from the repetitive, platitudinous defences of section one. There is no pseudo-theology here. Having thrown down the gauntlet of the Imāms' epistemic sovereignty, al-Ṣadūq now demonstrates their infallibility even regarding the most troublesome of questions. Both by the conspicuously heightened energy of the chapter's workings and the sheer fact of pulling acceptability even out of so infamous a group of reports, al-Ṣadūq gives powerful testament here not only to the unfailing truth of the Imāms' words but also the wrongs which faulty interpretation inflicts on them. 'If people only knew the rewards of affirming *badā'*, they would not shrink from attesting to it.'<sup>386</sup>

*Badā'* leads us decisively into the promised discussion of *jabr* that dominates *al-Tawḥīd*'s final section, beginning a long run of chapters addressing this and related problems of the

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<sup>385</sup> 'Mā *badā* lillāh *badā'* kamā *badā* lahu fī Ismā'īl.'

<sup>386</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 366 (h. 7).

relationship between God's power and human agency and culpability. The next six chapters address in sequence 'Will (*irāda*) and Intention (*mashī'a*),' 'Capability (*istiṭā'a*),' 'Tribulation (*ibtīlā'*) and Experience (*ikhtibār*),' 'Happiness (*sa'āda*) and Despair (*shaqāwa*),' 'The Refutation of Predestination (*jabr*) and Free Will (*tafwīḍ*)' and '*qaḍā'*, *qadar*, *fitna*, *arzāq*, prices (*as'ār*) and rewards (*ājāl*).'<sup>387</sup> We noted above that the question of *tashbīh* addressed in *al-Tawhīd*'s first section is the easy question of the book, and with *qadr* we have now arrived at the hard question. Madelung notes that it is in these areas that al-Ṣadūq is in his sharpest disagreement with the Mu'tazila, on no less pivotal a notion than the central Mu'tazilī creed of God's justice.<sup>387</sup> Madelung, however, bases his conclusions almost entirely on *al-I'tiqādāt* rather than *al-Tawhīd*'s treatment of this topic. The reasons for this are not hard to see, for while *al-I'tiqādāt* gives brief, definitive answers on points like free will and human agency,<sup>388</sup> *al-Tawhīd* is open to the same criticism which prompts Madelung to reject *al-Kāfi* as a viable source of theological thought: it presents only amassed *aḥādīth* that do not constitute full answers to theological questions.<sup>389</sup> Quite unlike the meticulous precision applied to the discussion of *badā'*, the these next six chapters of *al-Tawhīd*, whose titles promise solution to the second of the two points of contention al-Ṣadūq identifies in his preface, are pervasively vague, chaotic and inconclusive. We see exactly the same obfuscating features observed in the first section: reports are scattered at random with no attempt to group similar *aḥādīth*, and meanwhile there appears no attempt to structure the different reports to create argument or didactic such as we saw in the previous chapter on *badā'*.

Three of these six chapters have identically titled counterparts in *al-I'tiqādāt*: 'Will and Intention,' (*al-I'tiqādāt*, chapter ) 'Free Will and Predestination' (*al-I'tiqādāt*, chapter ) and 'Agency' (*al-I'tiqādāt*, chapter ). Each of the chapters in *al-I'tiqādāt* begins with al-Ṣadūq declaring that the Imāmī position on this topic is summed up in a brief *ḥadīth* that he then cites (a *ḥadīth* which, in all three cases, makes up the majority of the chapter's text). Conversely in *al-Tawhīd* all three corresponding chapters do contain these *aḥādīth* that perfectly encapsulate al-Ṣadūq's position (as articulated in *al-I'tiqādāt*), but in all three cases the *ḥadīth* in question is not placed prominently at the chapter's beginning, let alone introduced or framed by al-Ṣadūq's own prose, rather all three are positioned innocuously in the chapters' assembled *aḥādīth*.<sup>390</sup> Al-Ṣadūq is evidently not attempting to replicate the didactic structures of his creed here. It may further be observed that al-Ṣadūq's own voice is almost totally absent from these

<sup>387</sup> The same justice to which al-Ṣadūq pays enthusiastic lip-service in chapter five discussed above. See also Madelung, 'Imāmism', pp. 19-20.

<sup>388</sup> *Al-I'tiqādāt*, pp. 35-36, 41-42, 45-46.

<sup>389</sup> Madelung, 'Imāmism', p. 29.

<sup>390</sup> *Al-Tawhīd*, pp. 395 (h. 8) (compare with *al-I'tiqādāt*, p. 36), 399 (h. 2) (compare with *al-I'tiqādāt*, p. 41).

chapters. Unlike the vigilant hermeneutic policing with which we see in *al-Tawhīd*'s first section with its interjections and interpretations, these chapters are devoid of such comments save for two in the chapter on agency, and nowhere does he give full summaries of the doctrines that his *aḥādīth* purport to represent. This is particularly striking in the chapter on will and intention, given that in the parallel chapter in *al-I'tiqādāt* al-Ṣadūq is vocally on the defensive. In *al-I'tiqādāt* he twice decries those who misrepresent Imāmī beliefs on this point out of spite, and adduces in light of this a long list of Qur'ānic verses to support his position. He further provides a long case study on the death of al-Ḥusayn, rigorously demonstrating how God's utter control over human actions does not compromise the culpability of those who killed the imām.<sup>391</sup> In *al-Tawhīd*, meanwhile, there is no sign either of this apparently contentious issue or its accompanying sense of urgency.

Al-Ṣadūq's intention in these six chapters is far from clear. It is certainly the case that one can deduce clear overall messages from the almost one hundred *aḥādīth* that they contain: again and again in chapter fifty-five we read that nothing happens save with God's will, while in chapter fifty-six we are repeatedly told that nothing is demanded of God's servants beyond what they are capable of. Nonetheless, this is far from being unanimous let alone unambiguous. While supplying material pertaining to the core moral implications of God's power over humankind, these chapters also digress into other dimensions of their subject matter. Chapter fifty-five tells us amongst other things that God's will is accident<sup>392</sup> and that it is among his attributes of action.<sup>393</sup> Chapter fifty-six supplies a number of reports delving into the legal question of who qualifies as able to make the Ḥajj such that it is obligatory, as well as a report affirming the truth of 'Alī's claim to succeed Muḥammad (based around the exegesis of a Qur'ānic verse containing the chapter's eponymous concept, *istiṭā'a*). Nor are the compiled *aḥādīth* free of contradictions: in chapter fifty-five we read that both wretchedness (*shaqāwa*) and felicity (*sa'āda*) are from God,<sup>394</sup> but in another *ḥadīth* we conversely read that 'Whatever good befalls you is from God, and whatever ill befalls you is from yourself.'<sup>395</sup> Meanwhile, there are very occasional interventions (sometimes it is not clear whether these are from al-Ṣadūq or his source) which seek to mitigate the deterministic message of a *ḥadīth*, for example clarifying the statement that both good (*khayr*) and evil (*sharr*) come from God with this reading that 'good' refers to health (*ṣiḥḥa*) and 'evil' refers to sickness (*marāḍ*).

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<sup>391</sup> *Al-I'tiqādāt*, pp. 37-40.

<sup>392</sup> *Al-Tawhīd*, p. 369 (h. 1).

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371 (h. 5).

<sup>394</sup> *Al-Tawhīd*, p. 373 (h. 10).

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371, (h. 6).

Most vexing of all is the absence of the summaries which al-Ṣadūq used to clarify his apologetic chapters in the first section. He does not make the same effort in this third section to bring the disparate and diverse *ḥadīth* to a definitive conclusion, an omission which also contrasts with his discussion of such topics in *al-I'tiqādāt*. Not only is the absence of summaries striking by comparison, but the nature of the topic of free will and predestination, and the concern that al-Ṣadūq voices in *al-Tawḥīd* and elsewhere about the Imāmī position being overly identified with determinism, makes the leaving of large numbers of diverse and ambiguous *aḥādīth* to speak for themselves all the more curious and hazardous. A *ḥadīth* like, ‘God the exalted moves his servant from wretchedness to felicity, but does not move him from felicity to wretchedness,’<sup>396</sup> is clearly open to dispute. Does this refer to preordained states of felicity and villainy into which people are cast from birth,<sup>397</sup> in which case it is surprising that they can, in fact, be altered positively, or does it make the improbable assertion that a life of felicity can never change to a life of villainy? Al-Ṣadūq leaves it for the reader to decide. In chapter fifty-five we read of how ‘Alī’s devoted servant Qanbar comes to his aid in battle as the Imām is set upon from all sides, only to be told that it is the people of heaven, not of earth who guard him, and only by God’s permission can the former do anything to defend him, and therefore he should retreat and leave the Imām to his own devices. Taken to their logical conclusion, ‘Alī’s remarks entail a deeply theologically suspect kind of fatalism: if Qanbar is excluded from fighting alongside the Imām on the grounds that he is a mortal rather than celestial force, what excludes the Imām’s entire army from such censure? One would expect al-Ṣadūq step in to dispel such notions as he does so dependably in *al-Tawḥīd*’s first section, but he is nowhere to be seen.

A further feature that serves to inhibit the arrival at any definite answer to this burning epistemological question is the fact that these chapters are predominantly ordered according to the vocabulary they contain rather than strict pertinence to discrete theological questions. There is little to distinguish the message of these three statements: ‘God has rendered us capable of what he has demanded of us and he has rendered us capable of abstaining from what he has forbidden to us;’<sup>398</sup> ‘God wills that I am able to do things which he does not wish me to do;’<sup>399</sup> ‘God, blessed and exalted, is too generous to impose on people what is beyond their capacity, too mighty for there to occur in his domain what he does intend.’<sup>400</sup> They are taken, however, from three separate chapters. There is in fact one *ḥadīth* which occurs in both

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid., pp. 391-392 (h. 6).

<sup>397</sup> This is a concept described in a number of *aḥādīth* in the same chapter (chapter fifty-eight, ‘Felicity and Wretchedness’), e.g. hh. 3, 5.

<sup>398</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 380 (h. 4).

<sup>399</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 376 (h. 12).

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., p. 394 (h. 4).



chapter fifty-six and chapter fifty-nine.<sup>401</sup> It is, however, true not only that the vast majority of *aḥādīth* in each chapter contain that chapter's eponymous term or terms, but that when chapters include more tangentially relevant material, such as believer's ability to perform the Hajj or when God's will was created, these are tied to the chapter by their inclusion of the title vocabulary. This ordering of material by vocabulary rather than by conceptual distinctions certainly does not result in the creation of a precise terminology, rather it subdivides the overriding question of God's power over human wrongdoing in terms of different ways in which the same question can be talked about, confronting the reader with an enforced diversity of approaches that inhibits a straightforward, schematised conclusion.

In these chapters we see al-Ṣadūq exploiting the full obfuscatory potential of the compilation. He presents the reader with an abundance of *aḥādīth*, but scales back all devices by which those *aḥādīth* might be reduced to a definitive meaning. The imāms, he shows the reader, had a great deal of wisdom to impart on this subject, and they consistently affirm certain comfortable truths like God's omnipotence and the fact that he does not wrong his creations by making demands they cannot meet, but he does not make any effort towards reconciling their collected words.<sup>402</sup> This is clearly not a defensive measure. As Madelung and McDermott both point out, there is a great deal here that clashes obviously with the teachings of those same Mu'tazilīs whom al-Ṣadūq went to such lengths to placate in the first section.<sup>403</sup> Moreover, we saw in the book's opening how al-Ṣadūq laments misinterpretation of *aḥādīth* as one of the key reasons for the imāms' being ascribed unfashionable views, a risk which he expends great efforts to control in the first section with his commentary on the traditions, the same commentary that he conspicuously suspends here. More importantly still, we are now in the aftermath of the glorious demolition of *al-Tawḥīd*'s apologetic tone enacted in the second section.

In the tenacious opacity of these chapters, then, we see something quite different to section one's laboured demonstration of conformity. Rather, in the newly aggressive tone inherited from the middle section, these chapters enforce agnosticism upon the reader. In their unembellished, diverse, ambiguous and occasionally contradictory *aḥādīth* we see a declaration of the priority of text over doctrine. What matters is to revere what the imāms say and to approach it with due humility, not to subject it to the futility of reason-wrought abstracted doctrines. The absence of al-Ṣadūq's own voice here does not signal any less will

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<sup>401</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 56 (h. 8), 59 (h. 1).

<sup>402</sup> None of this, of course, is to deny that al-Ṣadūq must omit innumerable *aḥādīth* from *al-Tawḥīd* on the grounds of their unhelpful content.

<sup>403</sup> Madelung, 'Imāmism', pp. 19-20, McDermott, pp. 341-352.

to guide and direct his reader, rather in these chapters' abrupt change to an address consisting purely of *aḥādīth*, al-Ṣadūq announces them to his reader as the only real source of guidance.

This approach begins to intensify in chapter fifty-nine, 'The Denial of Free Will and Predestination.' The change is immediately clear: rather than simply advertising the subject matter, this chapter's title announces, too, the view that is to be affirmed with regard thereto. The view advertised is robustly supported in the chapter's twelve *aḥādīth*, all of which affirm that this infamous dichotomy is a false one, that one can affirm both God's omnipotence and humanity's capacity for culpable choice. Unlike the previous chapters, where potential conflicts and paradoxes are passed mutely by, here the paradox is identified and sanctified. To deny either of these twin truths, the *aḥādīth* repeatedly state, is unbelief. Though this is a move forward, al-Ṣadūq is still not eager to be more definitive than is necessary, particularly concerning how these truths are reconciled. As noted above, the tradition with which he frames this topic in *al-I'tiqādāt*, 'Neither free will nor predestination, but something between the two (*amr bayn al-amrayn*), is buried inconspicuously amongst the other traditions of the chapter, and the assembled *aḥādīth* describe the resolution of the paradox variously. One affirms only that there is a third position between the two extremes which is 'More vast than the space between heaven and earth.'<sup>404</sup> In another Ja'far al-Ṣādiq tells a disciple who presses him for the answer to this cosmic riddle, 'If I answered your question you would turn to unbelief!'<sup>405</sup> Yet another gives a less daunting response, likening God's paradoxical role to the man who sees his fellow doing wrong and admonishes him, only to see him continue in wrongdoing. The last *ḥadīth* of the chapter is notable for entering territory which for the most part *al-Tawḥīd* scrupulously avoids. 'Alī al-Riḍā tells a disciple that whosoever attributes *aḥādīth* sanctioning either *tashbīh* or *jabr* (note the pair here) to him or his forefathers has forged them and is amongst the *ghulāt*.<sup>406</sup> Al-Ṣadūq thus presents a consistent denial of adopting *jabr* over *tafwīd* or vice versa, but is thoroughly agnostic when it comes to bringing this denial to a conclusion.

It is in chapter sixty that this message of agnostic reverence of text comes to a head. This chapter bears a more idiosyncratic title than its predecessors: 'God's Decree, Preordainment, Sedition, Bounties, Prices and Rewards.' At first the tenor remains unchanged, though only the first two components of the title are addressed. 'His Preordainment and decree,' the first *ḥadīth* tells us, 'are two of God's creations, and God makes increase in his creation howsoever

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<sup>404</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 393 (h. 3).

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 397 (h. 11).

<sup>406</sup> We see here a sentiment that could have solved *al-Tawḥīd*'s apologetic objectives at the outset, al-Ṣadūq's omission of such a strategy all the more conspicuous for his admitting it here in the words of the imām, just one more *ḥadīth* amongst the hundreds that he presents and defends with no recourse to notions of forgery or, indeed, *ghuluww*.

he wills.’ In another we learn only that God created his preordainment fifty thousand years before the creation of the heavens and the earth.<sup>407</sup> Miscellanies notwithstanding, the shared theme of the *aḥādīth* is that humanity should accept what God has ordained, for it in their reckoning of their decreed lot that they shall be judged, and pondering the metaphysical mechanics of this is not only irrelevant but a seditious futility, ‘A deep sea; approach it not!’<sup>408</sup> However, as the chapter proceeds al-Ṣadūq escalates this detheologising of his compilation to cross the line between theology and what more resembles the pietistic, ethical content we encountered in chapter two of this thesis: ‘All the world is ignorance save where there is knowledge, all knowledge is a condemning witness save that which is acted upon, all action is vanity save that which is sincere, and sincerity is imperilled so long as the servant does not ponder the fate that awaits him.,’ declares the chapter’s tenth *ḥadīth*. No pretence is made here of providing reasoned speculation on the deeper workings of fate and destiny, rather the emphasis is now firmly on how the reader should behave. It in this direction, now, that al-Ṣadūq pulls the chapter. The message of pious, unenquiring submission to God’s decree is expanded into its ethical implications, moving in the process away from hubristic theological speculation. In another *ḥadīth* God announces, ‘Let whosoever is not content with my decree and does not believe in my preordainment worship a god other than me.’<sup>409</sup> ‘The generous man is he who attends to what God has ordained,’ declares another, ‘While the miser is he who begrudges what God has ordained.’<sup>410</sup> Al-Ṣadūq here narrates further variants of the story encountered earlier of ‘Alī refusing Qanbar’s help in battle on the grounds that God will protect him.<sup>411</sup> The story, with its vision of the imām’s heroic (if theologically dubious) submission to his fate, now appears unsurprising amidst this newly firm address of outlook over understanding. The chapter abounds in reports which identify themselves as sermons (*khuṭba*), preachings (*wa‘z*) and counsels (*waṣīya*), further emphasising its increasingly kerygmatic character. Two reports even contain passages of poetry.

As noted, the chapter at first only deals with *qaḍā’* and *qadar* at the expense of its other advertised topics. This continues for thirty-two *akhbār* which do not, on the whole, exhibit any internal ordering. The last one, conversely, appears portentous. ‘Alī says:

*Qadar* is a mystery from God’s own mystery, a veil from God’s own veil, a sanctuary from God’s own sanctuary, raised up in God’s own concealment and hidden from his creation. It is sealed with God’s seal and preeminent in his knowledge. God has placed

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<sup>407</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 403 (h. 7).

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 399 (h. 3).

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405 (h. 11).

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 408 (h. 16).

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 402 (h. 5), 414-415 (h. 26).

his servants far from the knowledge of it, raising it up beyond their sight and the limits of their reason, for they do not grasp it with the reality of sovereignty nor with the power of the everlasting, not with the majesty of radiance nor the splendour of unicity. It is a vast ocean which belongs to God alone and whose depth is the distance between heaven and earth, whose width is the distance between east and west, black as gloaming night, full of fish and creatures, at times rising and at others subsiding. At its bottom is a glowing sun, which none must approach save God, the one, the unique, and whosoever approaches it has thus challenged God, majestic and exalted, in his command and vied with him for his power, exposed his veil and his secret. He will come to face God's wrath, and his fate will be Hell, most wretched of ends.

Once again the message that there are mysteries beyond our comprehension rings loud and clear. There have been scattered statements to this effect in the *aḥādīth* of the past six chapters but the length and power of this, combined with its final position, marks it plainly as intended to command what has gone before. If readers have felt that al-Ṣadūq is not answering the questions he evokes, the reason why is no longer in doubt. In ringing contrast with section one and the question of *tashbīh*, when it comes to *qadr* his response to the Mu'tazila is not to demonstrate acquiescence but to channel the imāms' ruling that this is a mystery not to be explored, and the efforts of those who try (including the Mu'tazilīs) will earn them at best nothing and at worst damnation.

The chapter does not end here, however, rather the *aḥādīth* are interrupted by a long discourse from al-Ṣadūq himself. This begins with the familiar. God, we are told, decrees (*qaḍā'*) and has Preordainment (*qadar*) over all of his servants' deeds and all things, good and evil, that occur in the world. What follows, however, is truly radical. Al-Ṣadūq first declares that *qaḍā'* can simply mean 'knowledge of,' citing a number of Qur'ānic verses to this effect, thus opening the possibility (and only the possibility) that the previous statement in some cases means that God does not necessarily decree all things, good or evil, to happen, merely that he knows that they do. This being the case, al-Ṣadūq goes on, his initial statement becomes incontrovertible, for while people may disagree over God's role in relation to human agency, none dare deny God's total omniscience. *Qadar*, he meanwhile contents, can also mean to write, demonstrated this line by a line of poetry as well as a Qur'ānic verse, producing a similar effect. He proceeds, citing 'some scholars' that *qaḍā'* has no fewer than ten meanings, listing them in full. The meanings largely cluster around commanding, doing and knowing, the latter of which is the most useful to al-Ṣadūq's purposes as we have already seen. He reiterates his point to finish: that it is permitted (*yajūz*) to say that all things are by God's *qaḍā'* and *qadar*,

since their combined polyvalence more than suffices to ensure that such a statement is always true.<sup>412</sup>

This extraordinary manoeuvre, rehearsed in miniature in the earlier chapter on the Qur'ān, is clearly intended to be the final trump card in the defence of the Imāms' *akhbār*. We now see a clear trajectory from al-Ṣadūq's opening complaint of people's inability to understand the Imāms' words, to his own laborious explication of them, to his illustration of the miraculous hermeneutic depth of their understanding to this most radical statement of ambiguation which he now unveils. The exegetical, apologetic constraining of meaning found in section one is now turned on its head, as meaning is thrown wide open in this declaration of consuming, paradigmatic uncertainty. Theology is dead, killed by hermeneutics (or perhaps anti-hermeneutics; the impossibility of reading).

It would be a grim text that left us so immersed in doubt, and al-Ṣadūq does no such thing. This is not the end of chapter sixty, for thus far we have only addressed three of the subjects heralded in the title.<sup>413</sup> Now we move, somewhat precipitously, to 'prices': *aḥādīth* forbidding the monopolisation of goods and the manipulation of prices. 'Prices are God's concern; he

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<sup>412</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 419-424. McDermott (McDermott, p. 349) takes this discussion of the meanings of *qaḍā'* as a concession to the need for intellectual enquiry, and thus a retraction of al-Ṣadūq's oft-expressed disavowal of any discussion of the question, a reading which in turn contributes to his hypothesis that *al-Tawḥīd* is a later work than *al-I'tiqādāt* and *al-Hidāya*, written after al-Ṣadūq had been influenced by his rationalist neighbours at Rayy. This reading only seems viable if one is to disallow any coherence between al-Ṣadūq's various statements and cited *aḥādīth* across *al-Tawḥīd*, not least the fact that this statement of polyvalence immediately follows a formidable set of *aḥādīth* disavowing speculation on this matter. Conversely, as the above makes clear, these multiple meanings are not a self-defeating acquiescence to speculation but an illustration of the futility of confident judgements on this matter and on the *aḥādīth* themselves.

<sup>413</sup> Al-Ṣadūq in fact follows his pronouncement in *qaḍā'* and *qadar* with a second list of ten meanings, this time for the word *fitna*. Unlike the case of the first list, it is entirely unclear why he does this. *Fitna* is, of course, one of the subjects listed in this chapter's title. However, this taxonomy of its meanings stands alone as its sole appearance in the chapter; there is no conclusion, al-Ṣadūq draws no overt lesson from the reader from the material, nor does the word *fitna* appear in the chapter's *aḥādīth*. The taxonomy itself is conspicuously precise, with al-Ṣadūq taking the time to note that one 'Alī b. Hāshim considers the word to have an eleventh meaning, while his opinion is that this is subsumed under one of the ten previously listed. While it is not the goal of this chapter to pinpoint the reason for the exact location each and every component of *al-Tawḥīd*, this passage stands in the middle of a section in which al-Ṣadūq is breaking dramatically new ground, and pass over it as anomaly or whimsy seems inadequate. Its position is too important for it to be doing nothing, a fact which must strike al-Ṣadūq's intended audience as much as it does us. Indeed, the lack of any explicit linking of this passage to any wider argument, immediately following the rare urgency of argument driving the previous point, is highly conspicuous, conspicuous enough to produce the conclusion that its import must be implicit. Pondering what implicit signal the ten meanings of *fitna* might be, meanings refine its usual connotations of destructive sedition to include death, burning in hellfire, unbelief and tribulation, the answer is perhaps not so very mysterious. Al-Ṣadūq has just delivered the masterstroke in his argument against disputing or rejecting the reported words of the Imāms. Following this with a list of all the terrible things encompassed by the archetypal Islamic concept for the hubristic challenging of authority is a message which may well be left implicit. *Al-Tawḥīd* contends a depth of meaning which inspires fear as well as reverence.

raises them as he wills and lowers them as he wills.’<sup>414</sup> Carefully arranged, the opening *aḥādīth* are clarified and expanded on by later ones. Al-Ṣadūq intervenes in a long aside to carefully delineate acceptable and condemnable behaviour. This is a chapter designed to instruct. ‘Whosoever raises prices excessively then upon his head be it, and whosoever lowers prices upon his head be it.’<sup>415</sup> The leap from hermeneutic apocalypse to marketplace jurisprudence seems long, but there is a bridge: submission (*taslīm*) and contentment (*riḍā*). Trust in God, the merchant is told, and keep prices as they should be. Al-Ṣadūq brings the threads decisively together in his concluding remarks:

‘When [an increase in prices] is as a result of acts of God then it should be met with submission and contentment, as it should be in cases where a monopoly is a result of scarcity of resources or income. Acts of people and acts of God alike are known to first to God, just as is the making of all creation, in accordance with his decree and foreordainment, such as we have explained regarding the meanings of *qaḍā*’ and *qadar*.’<sup>416</sup>

Al-Ṣadūq thus deftly sweeps *al-Tawḥīd*’s theological mysteries back into the real world. The topic is, of course, ideal; what better than market forces to stand for the labyrinthine interface between human action and unknowable provenance? This is not an allegory, however, this is *sharī‘a*. Following al-Ṣadūq’s collapsing of the preceding two hundred pages’ speculation on divine will and human agency into the realm of the unknowable, the appearance of the known rules of God’s law is ringingly emblematic of the message of the whole text. Obey God’s law and submit to his will, al-Ṣadūq tells his reader. The rest is commentary.

One of *al-Tawḥīd*’s most memorable gestures is that al-Ṣadūq does not confine this construction of reverent obedience to matters legal, but thereafter takes it somewhere much more personal and emotive. Chapter sixty-one concerns how God’s infinite justice relates to the death of infants. This is, of course, a textbook locus for the affirmation of God’s total justice and the need for submission thereto in extreme circumstances, but it is also an ubiquitous lived trauma which demands consolation. Al-Ṣadūq’s detailed legal minutiae turn in a flash to kerygma and conciliation (as *al-Tawḥīd*’s text is forever ready to do), beginning with an elaborate eschatological diorama in which the deceased children of non-Muslims are brought before God on the day of judgement, whereupon he tests them to establish whether they are righteous and deserving of paradise, conjuring up the hottest fire of hell and bidding them throw themselves in. The virtuous children, of course, obey without question and enter the fire unharmed, while those who disobey are helpless as the fire comes to them to inflict

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<sup>414</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 425 (h. 33).

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, h. 34.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 426-427.

their just deserts.<sup>417</sup> In such elaborate content we see how this chapter's subject matter is not only a locus classicus for testing the notion of a just God but also a perfect context in which to demonstrate the efficacy of the radical traditionism at which *al-Tawhīd* has arrived. The events of judgement day, the fate of the deceased and, indeed, the fate of the unborn is not to be known by theological reasoning. Rather the Imāms and the Imāms alone, with their perfect, inspired knowledge, can give answers to such questions and comfort to the bereaved, knowing as only they can that God will treat them justly, will welcome them to paradise, and, as one tradition describes, will entrust them to the care of no less a heavenly nurse than Fatima herself.<sup>418 419</sup>

We are now nearing the end of *al-Tawhīd*, its contentions and transformations for the most part now played out. The text's central trajectory – from apology for the content of the imāms' traditions to their establishment as the supreme source of knowledge, the substitution of which with human reason is flagrant heresy – is by this point, as al-Ṣadūq concludes his treatment of *qaḍā'* and *qadr*, clear. In chapter sixty-two, 'That God Only Acts in His Servants' interests,' this concluding message is continued. Far from any abstract schematisation of God's justice, such as the title might indicate outside the book's context, the chapter roots contemplation of the divine ever more firmly in the devotional at the expense of the speculative. Though there are simple declarations to the effect that God knows best, these stand alongside the repeated sentiment that faith is its own reward. We are told that God hides the extent of his blessings to the faithful so that they might call on him all the more, and that the Prophet used to laugh at believers who mourned their misfortune, not realising the divine rewards that suffering brings. We also have the raw pietistics of the following: 'Lord dishevelled, dust-covered and with tattered garments, turned away from door after door, if I swear by God I remain faithful.'<sup>420</sup> Explication of God's mysteries is totally suspended in favour of an ideal of pious surrender, put forward in an eclectic and sometimes hymnic pedagogical mix complete with prayers and the stories of previous prophets.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> *Al-Tawhīd*, p. 328.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 431 (h. 8).

<sup>419</sup> While McDermott (pp. 349-350) discusses al-Ṣadūq's position on the fate of deceased infants, he does not cite this passage of *al-Tawhīd*, despite its being by far al-Ṣadūq's most extensive discussion of the problem. This omission is noteworthy as it illustrates the limits of reading *al-Tawhīd* purely as a doctrinal text. To do so is to find little in this chapter other than contradictions, with different descriptions of the day of judgement being presented which in turn may be variously interpreted to conflict with al-Ṣadūq's professed views on free will and predestination. When, however, one reads the text, as it announces itself, as a defence of the imāms' traditions, the utility of these colourful, inconsistent eschatologies becomes apparent.

<sup>420</sup> *Al-Tawhīd*, p. 437 (h. 2).

<sup>421</sup> The appearance of stories of previous prophets as a regular feature of *al-Tawhīd*'s final chapters is worthy of note, signalling as it seems to a change not just in register but in source criteria. No longer is

Chapter sixty-three, ‘The Command, the Prohibition, the Promise and the Threat,’ is something of a parting shot at the Mu‘tazila, addressing the God’s capacity to forgive sins (and the bearing thereof on his justice) and the concomitant question of intercession on the believers’ behalf by the Prophet and the imāms. The Mu‘tazila were distinguished by their denial that God could forgive major sins having pledged to punish them, while the also denied intercession on the basis that a perfectly just God should not change his judgement so arbitrarily. This chapter unapologetically presents a set of *aḥādīth* which challenge both of these views head on, in keeping with a long-standing Imāmī disagreement with the Mu‘tazilī view, including a *ḥadīth* in which the imām explicitly condemns the Mu‘tazila.<sup>422</sup> Where once al-Ṣadūq was defending the imāms’ traditions against the Mu‘tazila, those same traditions, now valorised as the sovereign source of knowledge, are adduced to condemn and contradict them. The chapter meanwhile continues the concluding, God-fearing mood of the book with a medley of warnings to act righteously in anticipation of God’s judgement.<sup>423</sup>

In chapters sixty-four and sixty-seven<sup>424</sup> al-Ṣadūq offers his resounding, belligerent conclusion. Both give their final message with that systematic unanimity which *al-Tawḥīd* so selectively deploys. Chapter sixty-four, ‘Instruction, Declaration, *Hujja* and Guidance’ presents seventeen *aḥādīth* affirming that knowledge comes from God alone, and that it is humanity’s duty only acknowledge that knowledge and its source and thereupon to act with humble righteousness. It concludes with the words of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq ‘Whosoever acts in accordance with what he knows, he has no need of what he does not know.’ Three chapters later, this is brought to a resoundingly absolute epistemological conclusion in *al-Tawḥīd*’s last chapter, ‘Forbidding Dialectic, Disputation and Self-Aggrandisement Regarding God.’ Amassing thirty-five separate *akhbār*, none of them more than a few lines in length, al-Ṣadūq presents with narration after narration condemning outright the practice of dialectic theology, tellingly merged with self-aggrandisement. When a *ḥadīth* appears in multiple versions they are now grouped together. The simple, ordered, unanimous, repetitive clarity delivered here is unparalleled in *al-Tawḥīd*’s text. The chapter’s message is meanwhile seamlessly wedded to the previous chapters’ message of piety, the hubris of theological speculation being portrayed as antithetical to humility and reverence. ‘Command your fellows to spare their tongues, to put aside squabbling over religion and to exert themselves in worship of God.’<sup>425</sup>

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he seeking the straightforward injunctions from the mouths of the imāms that made up the first half of the book.

<sup>422</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 444 (h. 4).

<sup>423</sup> As noted above, it is precisely with regard to this point of doctrine that Madelung and McDermott identify al-Ṣadūq’s most conspicuous clash with Mu‘tazilī views. Madelung, ‘Imāmism’, pp. 19-20, McDermott, pp. 341-352.

<sup>424</sup> The significance of the two intervening chapters will be addressed presently.

<sup>425</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 503 (h. 29).



Here, then, is the conclusion of *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*. In isolation this final chapter might be read (and often is) as a typical polemic against dialectic theology, but placed at the climax of *al-Tawḥīd* it a number of powerful, carefully interwoven assertions. It fuses the epistemological objection to reason's encroachment on the role of revelation with the pietistic command to suspend such idle speculation and focus on godly conduct. This, in turn, is merged with al-Ṣadūq's justification of the imāms' *ḥadīth*. Just as readers are exhorted to adopt a pious agnosticism towards the divine mysteries complex theological questions, they are urged to meet the imāms' traditions with a similar attitude. The words of God's *ḥujaj* are the only true guide to God's will, but like their subject matter they, too, can be mysterious and confusing, even dangerous if improperly approached. Just as the reader should act and endure with the conviction that God knows best, he should read the imāms' *ḥadīth*, however baffling they may appear with the reverent conviction that they contain the truth. *Al-Tawḥīd* sets out over its course a vision of traditionism as an ethical, hermeneutical, theological and epistemological paradigm, a way of living, of thinking and of reading with the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus enthroned at its very heart.

Reverence for the imāms' words must entail reverence for the imāms themselves. Indeed, we have seen in Chapter I how at the time al-Ṣadūq is writing no question for him is more urgent than that of the transition from authority represented in an accessible imām to authority represented in recollected *ḥadīth*. al-Ṣadūq engineers in *al-Tawḥīd* a contention of the authority of those *ḥadīth*, but he must contend too the equivalence between the texts of *ḥadīth* and the imāms whose teachings they convey. It is this contention that is made in between chapters sixty-four and sixty-seven, in one last, long aside in which this equivalence is addressed, in which is addressed, too the most emotive and perhaps the most destructive face of the hubris of *kalām*, and in which the contentions of *al-Tawḥīd* are taken to their greatest mimetic heights.

### **JIDĀL – The Councils of Imām al-Riḍā**

Chapters sixty-five and sixty-six each consist of a single long narrative, each describing a council (*majlis*) of al-Riḍā at the court of al-Ma'mūn. While describing different events they share a common scenario as follows: the jealous caliph plans to discredit the Imām by having him publicly defeated by skilled disputants whom he summons, but al-Riḍā, of course, roundly defeats all who oppose him.

We are already clearly in a stylistic space very different to that which we have occupied thus far. These reports, in their length, their drama, their narrative detail and the extent to which their extensive range of religious topics appear subservient to a larger endeavour of representation, stand far apart from the usual building blocks of *al-Tawhīd* (which, as discussed, al-Ṣadūq is for the most part eager to keep free of digressions). This difference, moreover, is clearly recognised in al-Ṣadūq's cordoning them off into two separate and prominently placed chapters.

The first of these councils falls into two distinct parts. In the first of these al-Riḍā debates with representatives of the Christians, the Jews and the Zoroastrians, whilst in the second he confronts the theologian 'Imrān al-Ṣābī. The debate with the religions of the book is a comforting triumphalism; a fantastical, indeed mythic vision of the traditionist ideal. Al-Riḍā begins by conceding to his non-Muslim opponents that he will debate with them using only their own religious texts, which he proceeds to do with devastating success. The Catholicos and the Exiliarch are dumbfounded as the Imām cites at them line after line from the Torah and the Gospels in which the coming of Muḥammad is foretold (many of which are entirely fictional), the Jew and the Christian conceding every time that the text is just as al-Riḍā says. He also knows the interpretation of passages which they do not, such as the identity of the foretold camel rider, bathed in light. He even knows the textual history of the Gospels, explaining to the Catholicos, who is quite open about his ignorance on the subject, how they were lost after Jesus' illusory crucifixion and only rediscovered by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John a century later. This is al-Ṣadūq's and *al-Tawhīd*'s vision of traditionism distilled and writ large. Knowledge of scripture, of its words, meanings and origins, is all, granting total victory and total ownership of knowledge itself. Coming at the close of a work which has engaged extensively with *kalām*, the utter absence of argument from this section rings unmistakably polemical, a monument to the omnipotence of correct knowledge of scripture. This, we are told, is how things should be.<sup>426</sup> The non-Muslim antagonists, with their stark, uncomplicated alterity (and looser demands of realism), allow this paradigm to be cast in far more absolute a mould than would Muslim interlocutors. The Imām's triumph stands as a dizzying intellectual ideal, standing in iridescent, inspiring contrast with al-Ṣadūq's tortuous negotiations. Nonetheless, the associating echoes are distinct: in al-Riḍā's berating of the Zoroastrian priest, demanding why, if he believes in Zoroaster and his miracles on the basis of *akhbār* then how can he reject *akhbār* which prove the status of other, more Abrahamic

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<sup>426</sup> Indeed, in the account of al-Ṣadūq's own debates at the court of Rukn al-Dawla we see exactly the same mode of debate. Al-Ṣadūq, as the account tells it, vanquishes his opponent simply by bringing forth *akhbār* which contradict, it seems irrefutably, the latter's argument. See *Majālis ma'a Rukn al-Dawla*, passim.

prophets, we see almost verbatim the driving argument with which al-Ṣadūq exhorts belief in the Hidden Imām in *Kamāl al-dīn*.<sup>427</sup>

The debate changes in tone when the defeated non-Muslims retire and ‘Imrān al-Ṣābī takes the floor. ‘Imrān’s exact identity is not dwelled upon: the text describes him only as a theologian and debater (*mutakallim*), one who has defeated all the scholars of Kufa, Basra, Syria and Arabia in debate, but his name obviously suggests a non-specifically non-Muslim origin. As becomes quickly clear, this allows him to ask questions and to be answered concerning the very fundamentals of the nature of God. Despite this suggested subversive identity of al-Ṣābī, however, the debate goes very smoothly. Though he asks questions which challenge the very fundamentals of Islam, such as from what the first entity was created, and whether it knew of itself, these remain precisely as questions. Al-Ṣābī does not retort, does not argue with al-Riḍā to any notable extent, rather he poses successive questions which act effectively as foils to which the Imām responds with much the same kind of kerygmatic material as we have found in abundance in chapter two and elsewhere. The Imām finishes a particular explanation, asks al-Ṣābī if he understands, to which he will give a humble affirmative before politely asking: ‘Master, tell me more.’ The scene is not a debate but an education, which accordingly culminates in al-Ṣābī not only accepting Islam but becoming a loyal disciple of al-Riḍā, eventually entrusted with financial responsibilities in Balkh.

The picture painted of traditionism has evolved here. The Imām himself no longer figures as the ideal traditionist, references to scripture in this debate being few and far between, rather he himself becomes scripture. The figure of al-Ṣābī is the object par excellence of the Imām’s inspired, indispensable guiding speech. He is sorely in need of guidance and so he receives it, perpetually acquiescent in the face of enlightenment after enlightenment from the lips of the Imām until finally he is brought into the fold. We now see those stirring sermons with which al-Ṣadūq began *al-Tawḥīd* represented in their rightful place, as scripture to be heeded without question, a place which al-Ṣadūq has fought to justify over the entire length of the book.

The mood changes as we move to the next chapter and a new council on a new occasion. The debate here is also with a *mutakallim*, but profoundly different in tone from that with al-Ṣābī. The interlocutor, Sulaymān al-Marwazī, is another figure whose exact religious affiliation is not dwelled upon, but his character as a disputant is established with an extraordinary degree of verisimilitude. Unlike al-Ṣābī, al-Marwazī argues, retorting, protesting and persisting in his opposition to the positions explained by al-Riḍā. The strategy, of course, is not a happy one. Al-Marwazī is made to squirm, contorting and contradicting himself, led down cul de sac after

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<sup>427</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 34, 85, 113-114, 117, 134 etc.

cul de sac until he finally breaks. The narrative of the debate is meticulously put together, as indeed it must be for this image of seething dialectic to work; al-Marwazī is repeatedly led into statements which clash disastrously with what he has previously said, in a developing conversation which requires far more structural integrity than al-Ṣābī's sequence of requests and affirmations. Moreover, the atmosphere here is quite unlike what preceded. There is a perennial reverence in the air of the first debate. Half way through the conversation with al-Ṣābī those assembled retire to pray. Al-Ṣābī is always polite, and al-Ma'mūn, too, steps in to question the Imām with similar deference. Conversely, there is a savage tone to the second council, as al-Ma'mūn mocks al-Marwazī with increasing derision. The caliph is, of course, the instigator of the affair, and it is in his interests for al-Marwazī to prevail, but once he has realised that he has backed the wrong horse he turns on his pawn, begging him sarcastically to desist in good grace and himself pointing out the contradictions in his arguments, even as his onlooking courtiers laugh.

There is a progression here. We move from a vision of the Imām as the master scriptural hermeneut to that of the Imām whose own speech is scripture. Where we then finish is a brutal warning against disputing this natural order, a reminder of the humiliation that awaits those who contest the Imām and thus, in al-Ṣadūq's era of occultation, who dispute the Imāms' narrated words. Al-Ṣadūq's traditionist message is brought to life in these richly coloured accounts, in which the central action of the debates is constantly accompanied by an absorbing level of narrative craft and detail, such as al-Riḍā's smile as he chides the disciple who seems worried that he might not win the debates. *Al-Tawḥīd*'s conclusion of devoted adherence to the Imāms' traditions in a time when the Imām is hidden is brought to life in the context of a living Imām, the adherence to textual authority transposed onto a represented past where it becomes loyalty to the living, resplendent teacher. In their equation of living and textual authority, the real imām and the *ḥadīth* that must now represent him, these accounts' drama and realism is thus central to al-Ṣadūq's goals.

There is a darker side to bringing the Imāms to life. As we progress to the final defeat of al-Marwazī a deeper, more visceral charge builds to impassion *al-Tawḥīd*'s final refusal of dialectic. The first council concludes with a thorough redemption of al-Ṣābī, detailing his subsequent fealty to al-Riḍā in a well-shaped conclusion which chimes with the straightforward positivity of his final conversion and his good behaviour throughout. On the other hand, there lurks al-Ma'mūn. The subtext of his defeat is dragged firmly into text as one of the onlookers muses, 'I fear for the Imam lest this caliph come to envy him, perhaps poisoning him or doing him some other harm.'<sup>428</sup> The ultimate, tragic conclusion of the

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<sup>428</sup> *Al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 481-482.

encounter is laid bare. Nonetheless, at this juncture al-Ma'mūn's menace is comfortably separate from al-Ṣābī's enlightenment and al-Riḍā's triumph. This separation does not survive the second council. Here the narrative ends rather abruptly when the wretched al-Marwazī at last concedes defeat. This is surprising, following so carefully narrated an account, not to mention the sculpted closure of the first council. There is a sense that something is wrong here, and that the cautionary tale of al-Marwazī carries a more threatening kind of hubris even than the murderous, usurping Abbasid on his throne.

Al-Marwazī's vanquishing is not a happy one. Even if he ends up conceding defeat like al-Ṣābī, the route taken robs this end point of its grace. The Imām has triumphed just as clearly, but the lack of any redemptive close combines with the raucous, irreverent tenor of the debate to suggest that, victory or not, something sordid has taken place here. As noted, the tenor of al-Riḍā's sermon-like answers to al-Ṣābī echo material found throughout al-Ṣadūq's text (even repeated word for word at one point), but the argumentative style in which the second *majlis* casts the Imām is much less familiar to what has gone before. The context is already an unnatural one. The atmosphere of the court is inherently doom-laden, for the reader knows, even before al-Ṣadūq reminds us, that al-Riḍā's summons thither by the caliph ends in his death. But alongside the threat of death there is also that of dishonour. Al-Riḍā's appointment by al-Ma'mūn was a tarnishing one, such that al-Ṣadūq is still, nearly two centuries after the event, anxious to absolve the Imām of any complicity.<sup>429</sup> It is in this deadly and degraded atmosphere that the fate of al-Marwazī becomes more than just an admonishing image of error. Against al-Ṣābī in the first debate the Imām is wholly effective in his divinely appointed office, but he is less the victor in the second debate. In the absence of any last redemption or conversion, the wrong of al-Marwazī was not rendered into right. There is no concluding reference this time to al-Ma'mūn's final murder of al-Riḍā, but as such there is no mention of his frustration at al-Riḍā's superiority. Without this comforting binary, looking at a conclusion that produced only humiliation and defeat, we feel that the Imām, mighty as he is, has been dragged somewhere he is not meant to be, his refutations of al-Marwazī forming a discordant chorus with the crowing of al-Ma'mūn and his courtiers. Such is the profound moral cost of disputing the Imām. As al-Ṣadūq tells us at the end of the chapter, God always grants his *ḥujja* victory, and that probative force remains unharmed, but to question it is to sacrilegiously haul the Imāms though sullyng discourses the like of which they are not meant to inhabit. There is something of Karbala here; something of the perverse, violent resistance to the divine which

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<sup>429</sup> See also Cooperson, pp. 95-96.

killed al-Riḍā as it killed al-Ḥusayn and, as al-Ṣadūq writes, has forced the Imām's indefinite absence upon his people.<sup>430</sup>

These council narratives constitute nothing short of apocalypse,<sup>431</sup> laying bare the both the perfection of the ideals for which al-Ṣadūq argues and the horrors of their violation. The moral-intellectual imperative of traditionism is here infused with the viscerally Shī'ī trauma at the Imām's defilement and absence. It is only, al-Ṣadūq shows us in these narratives, in the submission to the Imāms' narrated speech that we can overcome the disaster of the *ḥujja*'s disappearance. It is only now, having birthed from his text this seething emotive and moral value of the Imāms' *akhbār*, that he concludes it with his final, total refusal of the premise of debate whereby those *akhbār* were so obscenely challenged at the book's beginning.

## CONCLUSION

In many ways *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* has not taught us anything new. Both the epistemology it preaches and the practical, religious response to that epistemology which the book makes it its business to demand from the reader are familiar from the first part of this thesis. We see the same al-Ṣadūq who beyond all questions of source-criticism is concerned to solicit unconditional reverence for the recorded speech of the imāms, based on their unparalleled soteriological status. We also see the same al-Ṣadūq who, supremely capable and active jurist though he is, is often to be found detailing the letter of the law but rather encouraging basic pious attitudes of obedience before the sources of law and humility before God. We see the same al-Ṣadūq who, a little paradoxically, demands uncomplicated submission to the material he narrates even as he himself subjects that material to his considerable authorial skill.

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<sup>430</sup> For the importance of Abbasid persecution in al-Ṣadūq's vision of the occultation and its causes, see above, pp. and *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 507-508 (ḥḥ. 7-10).

<sup>431</sup> This is neither the first nor the last time we encounter the apocalypse as an important element in al-Ṣadūq's style of compilation. 'Apocalypse' is not meant here in the sense of the end of the world, but rather that of a final 'opening up' or, 'unveiling' (αποκαλυψη), showing things as they truly are. We alluded briefly to this in note 30 with regard to al-Ṣadūq's closing of his illustrations of the imāms' theological rectitude at the end of *al-Tawḥīd*'s apologetic section with a dramatic depiction of the imāms' refutation of the archetypally antimonotheistic heresies of dualism and trinitarianism. What we see here in the counsels of al-Riḍā is a more pronounced, more climactic repetition of the same device. At the close of his work al-Ṣadūq effects a radical shift in style to represent ('re-present,' that is to say to present afresh and anew) to his reader in dramatized, intensified form the truths he has been developing over the book's course. Hence, as described, the struggle to assert the value of the imāms' words is finally re-depicted not as epistemological debate but as the imām himself battling the evil caliph. So the reality of *al-Tawḥīd* is unveiled. This is a recurring device in al-Ṣadūq's writings, and we will see it again, no less strikingly, below.

Less familiar in *al-Tawhīd* is what we see of how elaborate and nuanced these simple contentions can become as al-Ṣadūq lays them out in the form of compiled *aḥādīth*. Most distinctive of this compilation in particular is the extent to which it sustains a linear, evolving address across its entire length. The passage from the apologetic introduction to the closing fulminations against *kalām* is unbroken, as al-Ṣadūq creates with simultaneous meticulous care and seething energy a transformation from defence to vindication to assault.

Apart from presenting us with an extraordinary iteration of al-Ṣadūq's epistemological vision, *al-Tawhīd* constitutes a vociferous and much-needed warning to scholars about the perils of reading an individual compiled *ḥadīth* as equivalent to a statement *in propria persona* of the compiler's own views. We have seen how attempts to read this book's contents as such inevitably enforce arcane decodings, gaping lacunae or both. What we learn from *al-Tawhīd*'s crescendoing hymn to the sovereignty of the Imāms' words is that al-Ṣadūq's *aḥādīth* exist, indeed live, in structures far larger than individual reports, and it is only by taking account of their relation to those structures that we can hope to understand them.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> A subsidiary point to this conclusion concerns the dating of *al-Tawhīd* and other works of al-Ṣadūq. McDermott hypothesises that *al-Tawhīd*, in its concessions to Mu'tazilī thought, represents a later stage of al-Ṣadūq's thinking than *al-Hidāya* and *al-I'tiqādāt* (McDermott, pp. 323, 341-352). As we have seen, however, to read *al-Tawhīd* as an overture to Mu'tazilism is not, ultimately, tenable, nor can the contents of individual reports be taken as confessions of faith. In the absence of other evidence, then, McDermott's chronology must be dispensed with.

## IV

### HIKMA – Looking for the Imām in *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni‘ma*

#### INTRODUCTION

In all three of the preceding chapters we have seen al-Ṣadūq preoccupied with the concern to exhort acceptance and reverence for the *aḥādīth* of the imāms as the only true way towards authentic, prophetic teachings and true understanding of the Qur’ān. In short, al-Ṣadūq’s endeavour is to have the imāms’ recorded words revered even as the living imām should be if he was still there to be revered. The reason he is not there, and thus the reason behind al-Ṣadūq’s emphasis on recorded texts, is the occultation. Al-Ṣadūq authored several works devoted to this subject during his career, of which only one survives, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni‘ma*.

*Kamāl al-dīn* is only the second-oldest complete surviving work devoted to the question of the occultation, out of scores of such works that were written in the first century after al-‘Askarī’s death,<sup>433</sup> and contains many texts and ideas of which we have no prior exemplar and some of which we have no other exemplar at all, and is thus of great historical value as a document of this doctrine’s development. Yet *Kamāl al-dīn* is also a curious work, both in the context of al-Ṣadūq’s oeuvre and in the broader output of its place and time of origin. While elsewhere we have seen al-Ṣadūq adhere stringently to narrating only the imāms’ *ḥadīth*, in *Kamāl al-dīn* we see those *aḥādīth* joined by a great variety of other sources. These narrated texts are meanwhile accompanied by an unprecedented quantity of al-Ṣadūq’s own prose. In *Kamāl al-dīn*, then, we see al-Ṣadūq grappling with the very doctrinal foundations of his traditionist stance, the absence of the imām, and we simultaneously see him mount an

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<sup>433</sup> The older work is that of al-Nu‘mānī. Both al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfi* and al-Khuṣaybī’s *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, both earlier works than *Kamāl al-dīn*, speak of twelve Imāms and give details of the occultation of the twelfth, though both address a broader range of topics. Another such text is pseudo-Mas‘ūdī’s *Ithbāt al-waṣīya*, which seems to date from the fourth/tenth century. Ibn Bābawayh the Elder’s *al-Imāma wa’l-tabṣira* introduces itself as a work on the occultation, but while it discusses the question at length in its introduction the remaining chapters of the text as it has come down to us do not discuss the Twelfth Imām. This is almost certainly because the work was either left incomplete or has been incompletely preserved, though some have suggested that the text indicates that Ibn Bābawayh the Elder was in fact a Wāqifī and did not accept the doctrine of twelve imāms. This latter suggestion is rendered unlikely by the extensive body of text to the contrary that al-Ṣadūq narrates from his father in *Kamāl al-dīn*. Ṭīhrānī in *al-Dharī‘a* lists a great many books entitled *Kitāb al-ghayba*, but there were doubtless many more discussions of the topic under less obvious titles, not least many of the *Kitāb al-imāmas* that Ṭīhrānī lists from the period. As far as extant works from al-Ṣadūq’s near-contemporaries are concerned, we have that of al-Nu‘mānī, a generation older than al-Ṣadūq, and al-Mufīd, a generation younger. It is these two works that will be our first port of call for any comparisons.



unexpected departure from the stylistic conventions that those foundations and that traditionism elsewhere compel him to adopt. In *Kamāl al-dīn* al-Ṣadūq faces the most formidable of problems, the paradoxical absence of the imām who must be present, and the corresponding ingenuity and daring that he brings in response makes *Kamāl al-dīn* his most complex and fascinating work.

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As observed, *Kamāl al-dīn* was neither al-Ṣadūq's first nor his only book on the occultation. As he tells us in the introduction, when in a dreaming visitation the Imām commanded him to write the work, he objected that he had already given the subject ample coverage. What he had yet to do, however, as the Imām pointed out, was illustrate how the occultation had been prefigured in the careers of earlier prophets.<sup>434</sup> Rather than a disturbing rupture, the current absence of the Imām from his community of believers was part of a long-standing pattern in God's eternal project to reveal his will to humankind. It is this particular aspect of the occultation, al-Ṣadūq tells us, that he now seeks to address.

Just like the opening sentiments of *al-Tawḥīd*, this little origin story tells us much about what *Kamāl al-dīn* is and what it is not. Al-Ṣadūq has told us that *Kamāl al-dīn* does not set out to give a definitive creed of occultation, be it to believers or hostile polemicists. Such groundwork, where al-Ṣadūq explained and substantiated his central views on the topic, had already been written in other books, sadly lost to us. Chapters addressing details of doctrine, such as the impossibility of the imāmate passing from brother to brother after al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, do appear in *Kamāl al-dīn*, but they are a rarity, interspersed mnemonically between the other materials that form the bulk of the work. This is no more a straightforward account of al-Ṣadūq's beliefs on occultation than *al-Tawḥīd* is a straightforward account of his beliefs on God's justice and unity, a fact similarly demonstrable by comparison with the very different texts wherein al-Ṣadūq does self-evidently set out to supply basic instruction to the faithful text like *al-I'tiqādāt* and *al-Faqīh*. In *Kamāl al-dīn* al-Ṣadūq instead builds on such prefabricated assertions, creating a work that is more complex and more ambitious.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>435</sup> Here we must disagree with Yoshida, who states that al-Ṣadūq relies on the unusual operations of *Kamāl al-dīn* at the expense of any 'straightforward' discussion, thus considering it the sum total of his treatment of the occultation. See Yoshida, pp. 97-98.

## OUTLINE OF KAMĀL AL-DĪN

As supplied for *al-Tawhīd*, here first there is a translated and annotated table of contents for *Kamāl al-dīn*. *Kamāl al-dīn* is both a longer and a more structurally complex work than *al-Tawhīd*. Below we delineate four distinct sections, defined on the basis of the different means of proof for the Hidden Imām and his occultation that they present. As we shall see, it is the construction and reconciliation of these different proof-types that is the work's central occupation. The first section is concerned with the examples of earlier prophets and sacred persons, the second with the prophecies concerning the Hidden Imām uttered by Muḥammad and the previous eleven imāms, the third with accounts of those who encountered the Hidden Imām either before or during his occultation and the fourth with less conventional proof-texts whose exact significance will need to be discussed at length.

### Introduction

1. On the Occultation of Idrīs
2. Recording Nūḥ's Appearance as a Prophet
3. On the Occultation of Šāliḥ
4. On the Occultation of Ibrāhīm
5. On the Occultation of Yūsuf
6. On the Occultation of Mūsā
7. Moses' Passing and the Onset of Occultation Amongst the Legatees
8. 'Īsā b. Maryam's Foretelling of the Prophet Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā
9. The Account of Salmān al-Fārsī Regarding the Above
10. On the Account of Quss b. Sā'ida al-Ayadi
11. On the Account of Tubba'
12. On the Account of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and Abū Ṭālib
13. On the Account of Sayf b. Dhī Yazn
14. On the Account of Baḥīrā the Monk

#### SECTION I – Stories of the Prophets (~70 pp.)

In this group of chapters, as their headings illustrate, al-Šadūq sets out instances of occultation observable in a diverse corpus of stories of the prophets.

15. The Story of the Leader of the Monks on the Route to Syria and his Knowledge of the Matter of the Prophet
16. On the Account of Abū al-Muwayhib the Monk
17. On the Account of Saṭīḥ the Priest
18. The Account of Yūsuf the Jew Regarding the Prophet
19. The Account of Dawwās b. Ḥawwāsh, who Came from Syria
20. The Account of Zayd b. ‘Amr b. Nufayl
21. The Reason Wherefore an Imām is Required
22. The Continuation of the *waṣīya* from Adam Onwards
23. God’s Investiture of the *Qā’im*
24. The Prophet’s Investiture of the *Qā’im*
25. What the Prophet Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation
26. What the Prince of Believers Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation
27. What is Narrated from the Sovereign of Women of the Matter of the *Qā’im*
28. The Account of the Tablet
29. What al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation
30. What al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation
31. What ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation
32. What al-Bāqir Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation

**Chapter 21** – Here we see the first example of a feature exhibited through the text of *Kamāl al-dīn* – the insertion of a brief chapter between the main sections outlining a particular doctrinal matter, deeply pertinent to the concerns of *Kamāl al-dīn* as a whole but not always especially related to the sections with which it is juxtaposed (for further instances see e.g. chapters 39 and 40). Not uncommonly for such chapters, the subject of this one has already been much discussed in al-Ṣadūq’s introduction.

**SECTION II** – Foretellings of the imāms (~150 pp.)

Here al-Ṣadūq collects reports from the eleven earlier imāms, Muḥammad and Fāṭima prophesying the occultation of the Twelfth Imām.

33. What al-Ṣādiq Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation
34. What al-Kāẓim Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation
35. What al-Riḍā Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation
36. What al-Jawād Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation
37. What al-Hādī Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation
38. What al-‘Askarī Related Concerning the Occurrence of the Occultation
  - i. What is Narrated from the *ḥadīth* of al-Khiḍr
  - ii. What is Narrated from the *ḥadīth* of the Horned One
  - iii. Returning to What is Narrated from Imām al-‘Askarī
39. Regarding One Who Denies the *Qā’im*
40. That the Imāmate is Never Possessed by Two Brothers Except for the Two Ḥasans
41. What is Narrated Regarding Narjis, Mother of the *Qā’im*
42. What is Narrated Regarding the Birth of the *Qā’im*
43. Those Who Congratulated Abū Muḥammad al-‘Askarī on the Birth of the *Qā’im*
44. Those Who Witnessed the *Qā’im*, Saw Him and Spoke with Him.
45. The Reasons of the Occultation
46. Record of the Written Missives [of the *Qā’im*]
  - i. The Supplication to be Uttered During the *Qā’im*’s Occultation
  - ii. Returning to the Written Missives

**i-ii** – Note how these two stories are somewhat incongruously inserted into the middle of the chapter on al-‘Askarī’s foretelling’s of his successor’s occultation. They would seem better placed either in the earlier section on the stories of the prophets or the later one concerning the *mu‘ammarūn*

### **SECTION III** – Accounts of the Hidden Imām (~ 100 pp.)

Here al-Ṣadūq presents the core proof-texts of the Hidden Imām: eyewitness testimonies to his birth and infancy as well as encounters in his later life, alongside the many documents reported to have been written by him. Though comparatively few chapters make up this section, it is of comparable length to the previous two, Chapters 44 and 46 both being of considerable length.

47. What Has Reached Us Regarding Exceptional Longevity
48. The *ḥadīth* of the *Dajjāl*
49. 'Īsā and the Gazelle in the Land of Nineveh
50. The *Ḥadīth* of Ḥabāba al-Wālibīya
51. The *Ḥadīth* of Mu'ammār al-Maghribī, Abū al-Dunyā
52. The *Ḥadīth* of 'Abīd b. Sharyā
53. The *Ḥadīth* of al-Rabī' b. al-Ḍab' al-Fazārī
54. The *Ḥadīth* of Shaqq the Priest
55. The *Ḥadīth* of Shaddād and his Garden
- i. Record of the Extraordinarily Long-Lived (*mu'ammārūn*)
- ii. Discourses From the Author of this Book
- iii. The Story of Bilawhar and Yūdhāsaf
- iv. The Meaning of These Stories' Inclusion in This Book
56. What is Narrated Regarding the Reward of the One Who Awaits the Relief
57. The Prohibition Against Naming the *Qā'im*
58. The Signs of the *Qā'im*'s Emergence
59. Miscellanies of the Book, and the Author's Clarification Regarding the Meaning of the 'Hiatus' (*fatra*)

**SECTION IV – The *Mu'ammārūn* (~120 pp.)**

The last substantial group of chapters, this one focusses on those possessed of unusually long life.

**Chapters 56-59** – Not unusually for a compilation, *Kamāl al-dīn* closes with a mix of material that is less precisely grouped than what precedes. The subjects of chapters 56 and 58 clearly fits near the end of the book, but the others less so. The uses to which al-Ṣadūq puts this device of closing miscellanies will be discussed presently.

## PROOF 1 – *Tawātur*

The introduction to *Kamāl al-dīn* is, in fact, a fascinating text in its own right, constituting not only by far the longest surviving piece of dialectic prose from al-Ṣadūq but one of the very earliest pieces of substantial length to survive from any Imāmī author. While other introductions to al-Ṣadūq's compendia extend to a couple of pages at most, *Kamāl al-dīn*'s introduction reaches approximately 150 pages in printed editions. It is thus an invaluable resource for the study of al-Ṣadūq and for the study of the Imāmīya in the tenth century, and meanwhile makes *Kamāl al-dīn* of all al-Ṣadūq's works the text for which we have a real opportunity to measure al-Ṣadūq's compiled material (of which the body text is composed) against a detailed opening discussion of what he aims to achieve with its compilation.

The concern of this introduction is above all the question of proof; of how the Twelfth Imām's occultation and, by extension, his legitimacy as the last successor to Muḥammad who will return as the *qā'im* at the end of time, is to be established as fact. It is at the very beginning of the introduction that al-Ṣadūq announces that it the evidence of earlier prophets' lives and exploits that concerns this new book on the occultation. How that evidence is to be used is far from straightforward, however. *Kamāl al-dīn* does not merely undertake to present such stories of previous prophets as may support the Imāmī view on occultation, rather it is an extended experiment in how these stories can function as proof and how, as such, they may interact with the broad range of other probative strategies used by the Imāmīya. It is this question of unparalleled urgency, that of how the truth of the Imāmīya's defining doctrine, that of the Hidden Imām, may best be asserted, that *Kamāl al-dīn* sets out to confront.

To this end al-Ṣadūq spends a portion of the introduction shoring up some core theological proofs of the imāmate in general, in particular seeking to refute the notion that anyone other than God himself can nominate the *ḥujja* who will guide humankind. Much of this is centred around the Q 2:30, 'And God said to the angels, "I shall place a vicegerent (*khalīfa*) upon the earth..."' into which al-Ṣadūq delves to considerable hermeneutic depth to affirm that the process here described with regard to Adam not only identical is with the Imāmī doctrine of the imāmate but also refutes categorically any suggestion that the community may choose their own imām, such as is contended by a variety of non-Imāmī groups.<sup>436</sup> He also allots some

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<sup>436</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 34-49.

space to brisk refutations of rival Imāmī groups such as the Kaysānīya and the various strands of the Wāqifiya,<sup>437</sup> and to the treatment of some more technical questions such as the legitimacy of an imām who conceals his own imāmate.<sup>438</sup>

It is not long, however, before we arrive at the axial question of how one identifies the hidden son of al-‘Askarī as the imām, and, indeed, how one justifies his imāmate in the face of his unusual hiddenness. It quickly becomes clear, moreover, that al-Ṣadūq’s preferred method of proof is textual. The dominant concept at work here evoked by al-Ṣadūq is that of *tawātur* – a density of textual evidence too formidable to dismiss as forgery. Al-Ṣadūq contends vigorously and repeatedly, including lengthy citations from earlier Imāmī authorities,<sup>439</sup> that it is by this most solidly textual of means that the truth of the Twelfth Imām and his occultation is proven, regardless of the stubbornness of the majority who ignore this irrefutable evidence. This is not only an assertion that the *aḥādīth* are, indeed, *mutawātir*, but also that such textually-based probative methods have value in this context. Al-Ṣadūq cites opponents of the Imāmīya who mock the so-called ‘inevitalists’ (*lābuddīya*), a group of Imāmīs who claimed that the Hidden Imām’s existence was proven purely by the fact of theological necessity, regardless of what proof might be lacking for his positive identification.<sup>440</sup> He responds to such criticisms by maintaining that it is the texts that supply the essential proof.<sup>441</sup>

We observed in Chapter I how reticent al-Ṣadūq is when it comes to delving into the uncomfortable technicalities of the comparative reliability of *aḥādīth*.<sup>442</sup> In some ways this elaborate insistence on *tawātur* might appear to be a change of heart. As well as being the longest single example of al-Ṣadūq’s prose, *Kamāl al-dīn*’s introduction also contains, in its discussions of *tawātur*, the longest single example of al-Ṣadūq discussing matters of authenticity. It is not, however, in the technicalities of *tawātur* that al-Ṣadūq concentrates his arguments. Indeed, *asānīd* are not discussed at all. The *tawātur* that al-Ṣadūq presents is a concern of volume, an assertion not primarily of reports’ quality but of their number.<sup>443</sup> Even

<sup>437</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 62-75, 112.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79

<sup>439</sup> While al-Ṣadūq cites unnamed sources (e.g. *Kamāl al-dīn* p. 93-94) elsewhere he names his sources, making *Kamāl al-dīn* a valuable repository of earlier fourth/tenth-century Imāmī theology. Most prominent in this regard are the lengthy quotations of Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī and of ibn Qiba al-Rāzī, including the latter’s polemics against named Zaydī scholars, who are also cited at some length. (*Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 83-93, 118-157). Indeed, the quotations of ibn Qiba in *Kamāl al-dīn* form the basis of Modarressi’s ground-breaking study of him. See Modarressi, *Crisis*.

<sup>440</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 82. We will below see how al-Mufīd presents just such an argument.

<sup>441</sup> Assertions of the value of textual proofs as the ultimate lynchpin of the Imāmī position pervade *Kamāl al-dīn*’s introduction.

<sup>442</sup> See above.

<sup>443</sup> The reliability of reports is, of course, crucial if their quantity is to have any value, and al-Ṣadūq certainly does not suggest that quantity supersedes the reliability of individual *asānīd*. Rather his focus on the quantitative question of *tawātur* allows him to leave the matter of reports’ comparative reliability largely implicit.

here he prefers to be vague, only once entering discussion of how sources are needed to constitute *tawātur*.<sup>444</sup> What al-Ṣadūq instead focusses on is the existential need for textual proofs that is imbedded within the very fabric of religion itself. It is only by texts that we know of Muḥammad and his miracles, only by texts that we can know his teachings. Al-Ṣadūq's argument pivots on the assertion that his opponents cannot reject his textual proofs without implicitly denying the validity of all textual proofs, textual proofs without which Islam could not exist. Again and again al-Ṣadūq asserts that the *tawātur* of the texts proving the existence, legitimacy and occultation of the Twelfth Imām is fundamentally equivalent to the *tawātur* that underpins the key texts of Islam, and thus that one must either accept their probative force or join the undesirable company of the Brahmins (*barāhima*), that is to say those outside Islam who do not accept any Abrahamic sacred texts and so reject all God's prophets.<sup>445</sup>

This is an audacious declaration of textual strength, and one that responds to anxieties at the heart of Imāmī *ḥadīth* scholarship. Al-Ṣadūq's assertion is first and foremost one of probative equivalence, claiming for Imāmī *ḥadīth* as much validity as any other, and thus battles precisely against the exclusion from the mainstream faced by the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus and those who rely on thereon. Al-Jāḥiẓ famously remarks of the Shī'a that they make up what they like and then attribute it to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, and a hundred years later when al-Ṣadūq was writing the same prejudices against the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus in particular (quite apart from suspicions of *ḥadīth* as a whole) continued to be a hindrance. We shall see below how many Imāmīs turned to narrating *aḥādīth* from Sunnī sources in an effort to attain a probative traction denied to what they narrated from the imāms.<sup>446</sup> In *Kamāl al-dīn*'s introduction we see cited an antagonist's troubling complaint that the *aḥādīth* that the Imāmīya have their own trusted sources just as every group does, and the existence of such sources is not enough to make their testaments binding for everyone.<sup>447</sup> Against all this al-Ṣadūq makes his opening claims of *tawātur*, claims for which, we shall see, he amasses extensive support in the book that follows.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 114-115. The context of this detail is also thoroughly defensive. Al-Ṣadūq registers the voices interrogating whether the *tawātur* of reports confirming the prophet's miracles is not rather stronger than that with which he affirms the occultation, responding with the intimation that those traditionists (*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*) who narrate such prophetic miracles as the splitting of the moon could not, in fact, muster more than three reports, contrary to his opponent's fancy that they could draw on ten or more. Al-Ṣadūq thus maintains that his own distinctly minimalist criterion of three exemplars is a common standard.

<sup>445</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 34, 85, 113-114, 117, 134 etc. For a discussion of this role of the Brahmins in Islamic thought as those monotheists who reject all Abrahamic prophets (amongst other characteristics attributed to them), see Calder, 'Barāhima'.

<sup>446</sup> See below.

<sup>447</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 138.

<sup>448</sup> Parts of the introduction and especially its lengthy citations from figures like Ibn Qiba al-Rāzī (see note 7 above), most of whom were more theologically inclined than al-Ṣadūq himself, take the form of



## PROOF 2 – *From The Impossible to The Possible*

Even as al-Ṣadūq fulminates in his introduction to assert the unimpeachability of the occultation's textual proofs, he meanwhile introduces a second avenue of proof that works along quite different lines, and which plays a no less pivotal role in the work that follows. This is the objective 'to move [the occultation of the Twelfth Imām] from the realm of the impossible to the realm of the possible (*min ḥadd al-maḥāla ilā ḥadd al-jawāz*).'<sup>449</sup> It is this endeavour that underpins *Kamāl al-dīn*'s stated *raison d'être* as commanded by the imām to al-Ṣadūq in his dream: narrating the occultations of earlier prophets. If Moses can be hidden from his *shī'a*, so, too, can the Twelfth Imām. If Noah can live for a thousand years, so too can the Twelfth Imām. The sacred precedent of prophetic history proves that Imāmī claims about their Hidden Imām are, at least, possible.

This is a probative strategy quite distinct from the aspirations to *tawātur* outlined above, not to mention a much more modest one. Al-Ṣadūq has regressed from proof to possibility, from declaring the Hidden Imām a textually indisputable fact to the mere aspiration of convincing the reader that it could have happened. What brings these two probative strategies closer is al-Ṣadūq's citation of a group of *aḥādīth* in which Muḥammad declares, 'Whatsoever has fallen previous communities will befall my community also.'<sup>450</sup> This, al-Ṣadūq points out, lends the *qīṣaṣ* material greater significance than merely making the occultation of the imām possible. Rather, if as the Prophet says the experiences of previous communities must be repeated, then

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*kalām* discourses, contending with interlocutors and refuting their detailed refutations of various aspects of the Imāmī view of occultation (these in fact make *Kamāl al-dīn* a valuable source of early evidence for how other groups argued against the Imāmīya in this period). Though Sunnīs are referred to, the primary opponent of these arguments are Mu'tazilī-inclined Zaydīs, al-Ṣadūq describing the Zaydiyya as 'our fiercest opponents.' (*Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 157) These opponents give some biting criticisms, accusing the Imāmīya amongst other things of relying on questionable interpretations of texts and lacking sufficient proof-texts to claim *tawātur*. It is interesting to note that al-Nu'mānī's *Kitāb al-ghayba* directs itself primarily against Ismā'īlī and especially Fāṭimid claims (al-Nu'mānī, pp. 179, 240-245), while both he and al-Kulaynī are recorded as authoring works against the Ismā'īlīs (al-Najāshī, pp. 361, 367). Both scholars, like al-Ṣadūq, were based around Rayy and Qum. Al-Ṣadūq's contrasting interest across his extant writings in the same broadly Zaydī-Mu'tazilī opponents encountered in *Kamāl al-dīn*, at the expense of any especial interest in Ismā'īlī interlocutors, corroborates our information about Ismā'īlī activities in the region. Having fostered a vigorous missionary campaign in the first half of the fourth/tenth century in Khurāsān with its centre at Rayy itself, the Ismā'īlīs' fortunes took a sharp turn for the worse after 332/943 (around a decade before al-Ṣadūq became active) and they ceased for the next few decades to be a significant intellectual force in the region. See Stern (1960), pp. 79-80. *Kamāl al-dīn*'s fiercest engagement with Ismā'īlī ideas is when Zaydī opponents cite the Ismā'īlī genealogy of Imāms as a foil against the Imāmī claims (*Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 100-104).

<sup>449</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 111, 157.

<sup>450</sup> Also frequently evoked are a group of *aḥādīth* in which Muḥammad states that the *qā'im* will exhibit the *sunna* of one or more previous prophets, many of which will involve concealment, for example Mūsā's concealed birth or Muḥammad's use of the sword. See e.g. *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 58, 176-7, 184.

our learning of the occultations that occurred in former times compel us to accept that such a thing is bound to occur in the age of Islam. Not only can something that has happened before happen again, but in the case of prophetic history what has happened before must happen again.

We can certainly see points of overlap between this proof and that of *tawātur*. If events in the past are to prefigure the present, it must surely be established whether or not they happened, a task for which *tawātur* is a useful tool. Conversely, the admission of this second line of argument calls the lie to the confidence of al-Ṣadūq's previous claims. If accounts of the imām's existence do, indeed, prove his existence beyond any doubt, there would scarcely be a need to look for further proof in exemplars from the distant past. These two modes of proof conflict at least as much as the complement, a relationship which we shall see played out extensively and artfully over the course of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s many pages.

A key, immediate consequence of this plurality of proofs that al-Ṣadūq established in this introduction is that in these different kinds of argument the reader is offered a range of ways to read the many texts that will pass before him over the course of the book, as well as a corresponding range of expectations. Sometimes there will be clear indicators of what a particular text is for. The first section of the book is a collection of stories of earlier prophets, texts that the introduction has already specifically tied to the 'whatsoever has befallen' line of argument, and which al-Ṣadūq accompanies with frequent commentary asserting their probative value in these terms. Elsewhere, as we shall see, there are groups of texts that clearly undertake to represent *tawātur*. In many places, however, things are not so clear, and it is left up to the reader to decide whether a text is meant to be read as an inviolable fact, the disputation of which is tantamount to disputation of the reality of Muḥammad's mission, or as a precedent of the prophetic past that must find an echo in the present, or some combination of the two. It remains to be seen whether this proliferation of hermeneutic options will be empowering or will instead leave the reader in debilitating uncertainty.

*Kamāl al-dīn*'s introduction lays out the key theological proofs of the imāmate on which any discussion of the occultation must rest. Al-Ṣadūq is careful to note that if one does not accept the basic premise of the necessity of imāmate, there is little point in arguing over subsidiary questions of who and where that imām is and thus of the occultation.<sup>451</sup> It also prepares the reader for the fact that beyond these foundations on which the importance of the book's subsequent arguments rests, what follows will not be a book of theology, rather it will be a book about the nature and efficacy of textual proofs. Unlike *al-Tawḥīd*, which is nothing if

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<sup>451</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 74.

not a book of surprises, in *Kamāl al-dīn* al-Ṣadūq uses his enormous introduction to set before the reader the core principles on which the rest of the book will pivot: the two proofs of *tawātur* and ‘Whatsoever has befallen previous communities will befall my community also.’ *Kamāl al-dīn* sets out to deploy these proofs and to exploit them for all they are worth, but it also conducts an exploration both of their respective possibilities and of the possibilities of their combination. Just as in *al-Tawhīd*, al-Ṣadūq’s introduction to *Kamāl al-dīn* tells us that it is not doctrine that concerns him here, rather it is a book about the texts from which doctrines and more may be derived. Just like *al-Tawhīd*, *Kamāl al-dīn* is a book about the imāms’ *aḥādīth*.

## TALES OF THE PROPHETS

It is with the motion from impossible to possible that the main body of *Kamāl al-dīn* begins, embarking in earnest on al-Ṣadūq’s stated goal of demonstrating that the current occultation of the Imām is an established phenomenon in the history of God’s ongoing revelations to humankind. To this end, he presents through the medium of a large body of reports a select history of the occultation of prophets since the beginning of time. We read story after story of God’s chosen and their adventures in a wonderful corpus of *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* material. Al-Ṣadūq presents a range of Qur’ānic prophets in chronological order, starting with Idrīs (identified as a son of Ādam), and proceeding through Nūḥ, Ṣāliḥ, Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, Mūsā and Jesus up to Muḥammad himself. Though their protagonists are familiar, as often as not the events described are less so: we read about Nūḥ’s flood and about Yūsuf’s longing to be reunited with his father Ya‘qūb, but we also read about Ibrāhīm’s encounter in the desert with the mysterious old man from beyond the sea and about the hidden island on which Jesus’ loyal followers were secreted to safeguard his religion. The narratives are filled with the dramatic unfolding of the divine will, with marvels and wonders and with suspense and vindication.

Though al-Ṣadūq’s narrations are certainly the familiar stuff of the ‘stories of the prophets’ genre,<sup>452</sup> both in substance and presentation it is thoroughly subjected to al-Ṣadūq’s objectives.

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<sup>452</sup> Despite their relative prominence, *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, ‘the stories of the prophets,’ as manifest both in dedicated collections and in more diverse works such as Qur’ānic exegeses, *ḥadīth* compendia and *adab* literature, have received little study, either in terms of their nature and the extent to which they constitute a distinct genre or in terms of their reception amongst premodern readers. Nagel remains an authoritative survey of the genre with little to supersede it. It is of interest with regard to *Kamāl al-dīn* that Nagel identifies al-Tha‘labī (d. 427/1035), a near-contemporary of al-Ṣadūq, as the point where we first see collections of stories of the prophets emerge as a genre distinct from historiography. Al-Tha‘labī’s stories certainly have a great deal in common with al-Ṣadūq’s *qīṣaṣ* material in *Kamāl al-*

No story passes in which it is not clear to the reader that the prophet protagonist has not undergone some form of concealment that is portentously analogous to the present occultation of the imām. The care with which al-Ṣadūq has selected his corpus is very clear. He does not tell the prophet's stories from beginning to end, and makes little effort to coalesce a synthesised narrative. Rather what he presents is an anthology of all the episodes of occultation to have occurred in these prophets' careers. Some prophets were hidden from their followers on more than one occasion, in which case the separate episodes will be presented with no attempt to link them together. Sometimes al-Ṣadūq introduces a prophet's story with a brief, instructive summary, but for the most part the stories are made up of narrations, transmitted from a stock of teachers familiar from his other compendia.

The stories are emphatically diverse, and exactly what may constitute an occultation varies considerably from text to text. A prophet may be hidden, like the Twelfth Imām, for fear of persecution, such as when the infant Ibrāhīm is hidden from the depredations of Nimrūd, who has heard tell of the child to be born who will spell his downfall.<sup>453</sup> In other instances, however, more benign episodes in a prophet's life will be appropriated for the occultation paradigm, such as Moses' adoption by Pharaoh's daughter (and thus his subsequent absence from his mother and the Israelites), Joseph's years in Egypt apart from his grieving father and even Solomon's remaining closeted with his new wife!<sup>454</sup> Al-Ṣadūq's instructive voice aids the process when an event is perhaps less obviously an exemplar of occultation, both by his expressly framing the stories as tales of occultation and occasionally by his inserting commentary to identify the key elements of a given narrative. Moreover, the diction of the accounts themselves sets them firmly within al-Ṣadūq's desired frame of reference. The word *ghayba* itself and its cognates are a recurrent presence in the stories, as are stock Imāmī terms of *rujū'* ('returning'), *khurūj* ('emergence') and *zuhūr* ('reappearance') as descriptors of the different protagonists' return from their occultations. Moreover, the occultations themselves are regularly enriched with further details which can only resonate deafeningly with the Imāmī reader. Prophets will console their followers with the promise of a future *qā'im* who will one day come to relieve them (this being neatly identified with the next prophet in the sequence of chapters: Idrīs foretells the appearance of Noah, Noah tells of Hūd and so on); the expected figure will often be identified as a young man (*ghulām*) like the *mahdī* himself; many a loyal *shī'a* accompanies prophets and awaits (*intiẓār*) their return from occultation, even while their faith and resilience are sorely tested; we hear how when prophets do return many lack the purity of heart to recognise them; sometimes there is a *faqīh* to whom they may turn for

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*dīn*, exhibiting (at much greater length) a similar spectrum of the wondrous, the entertaining, the moving and the miraculous.

<sup>453</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 169-171.

<sup>454</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 173-176, 180, 189-190.

guidance in the prophet's absence; prophets leave legatees (*waṣīy*) after them; those who seek a sign of the hidden *ḥujja* will always be granted one if they persevere.

The corpus is a remarkable one and it is to be regretted that pending new texts coming to light we know little about its sources. Nonetheless, its sheer size and the pervasive presence of Shī'ī motifs within the individual *aḥādīth* indicates a number of important things about this group of texts and al-Ṣadūq's use thereof. We may deduce that, excluding the unlikely event of large scale forgery on al-Ṣadūq's part, in the late tenth century there already exists a prodigious array of *qīṣaṣ* material which is steeped in unmistakably Imāmī concepts and language, including but by no means limited to those directly pertaining to the Hidden Imam. This tells us in turn that there was by this time an established interest amongst Imāmīs in identifying and imagining precedent for the current soteriological status quo in the vast literature of *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*. This, in turn, makes it very unlikely that *Kamāl al-dīn*'s stated objective of recounting the Hidden Imām's precursors amongst previous prophets was an entirely new venture.<sup>455</sup>

This information reinforces what we already suspect about *Kamāl al-dīn*. The simple exercise of presenting these stories of previous prophets and their occultations is not, contrary to al-Ṣadūq's account of his dream, the full extent of this book's ambitions.<sup>456</sup> Rather al-Ṣadūq is drawing on a pre-existing Imāmī literature to explore how these marvellous stories of hidden

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<sup>455</sup> Needless to say, as *Kamāl al-dīn*'s own title illustrates, there is no way to positively identify such other works on the subject as may have existed from the bibliographical record alone. Yoshida notes in his discussion of *Kamāl al-dīn* that stories about al-Khiḍr, at least, appear in Shī'ī literature in the mod-fourth/tenth century, a contention for which he cites Franke who, in turn, cites *Kamāl al-dīn* as the earliest exemplar (Yoshida, p. 94, Franke, p. 11). The most similar extant text to *Kamāl al-dīn* in terms of its use of *qīṣaṣ*, material, and one that may well be earlier, is pseudo-Mas'ūdī's *Ithbāt al-waṣīya*. Here, too, is a work which prefaces accounts of the Hidden Imām with accounts of earlier prophets in which an Imāmī colouring, including many a motif of the occultation, is clearly evident. In pseudo-Mas'ūdī's text, however, the focus is less on the Twelfth Imām than on creating a continuous narrative, and in between the stories of the prophets and the accounts of the Hidden Imām there is a fulsome set of chapters concerning the earlier imāms, while the discussions of proof and its construction that so dominate *Kamāl al-dīn* are entirely absent. This unique similarity to *Kamāl al-dīn* certainly renders the work's uncertain provenance and dating all the more irksome. Indeed, its similarity to *Kamāl al-dīn* is a not insignificant component of its probable dating to the fourth/tenth century, such that to adduce it as evidence for the study of al-Ṣadūq's text risks becoming circular. The text's *asānīd* certainly argue for a date in the first half of the fourth/tenth century, narrating from such late-third/ninth-century figures like Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ash'arī and 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ja'far al-Ḥimyarī, though this does not rule out the possibility of later links being elided. Moreover, these *asānīd* only occur in the second half of the work, with the first half narrating straight from Muḥammad and the imāms without *asānīd*. This may be indicative of differing standards towards *qīṣaṣ* material, but it could also indicate the composite nature of the work. The component of the work concerning the Twelfth Imām cannot, of course, predate the turn of the fourth/tenth century. If nothing else, the book certainly attests to a circulation of Imāmī-influenced *qīṣaṣ*-material around the time of al-Ṣadūq's writing *Kamāl al-dīn*. For discussions of the book's provenance (albeit rather more focussed on the fact that al-Mas'ūdī probably didn't write it rather than who did) see Pellat; Khalidi *Islamic Historiography*, pp. 136-142.

<sup>456</sup> It is no surprise that the originality implied in al-Ṣadūq's description of his motivation to write the book is a rhetorical device rather than a statement of fact.

infants and hidden prophets can be of use in the broader contests over proof and legitimacy set down in his introduction.

## NAṢṢ

The impression that al-Ṣadūq's work is not done with this recounting of tales of occulted prophets is confirmed by the fact that when they finish we are still not far beyond the first third of the book. The collected *qiṣaṣ* materials in fact take up considerably less room than the introduction that precedes them. It is quite clear that this extraordinary corpus has resoundingly, edifyingly and very entertainingly accomplished al-Ṣadūq's professed aim to show the longstanding pedigree of the occultation. Immersed in these tales, both the Hidden Imām and his beleaguered awaiting *shī'a* look fully at home. But as the curtain falls on the last of the prophets, Muḥammad himself (whose presence among the Arabs, unrecognised as the best of humanity until God first despatches him on his prophetic mission, is analogous to the Twelfth Imām's unrecognised presence among the believers<sup>457</sup>), it is clear that our author has more to offer. What follows is the next stage of the story: that of Muḥammad's successors and the Twelfth Imām himself. Al-Ṣadūq relates in a long sequence of chapters the accounts concerning the Hidden Imām's birth and disappearance, his predecessor's foretelling and designation (*naṣṣ*)<sup>458</sup> of him and then a wide variety of witnesses to his continued, concealed existence in occultation, be it in the form of letters received from him or, more rarely, face-to-face encounters.

It soon becomes clear that al-Ṣadūq is doing more than bringing his narrative up to date, thus completing the necessary comparison with the *qiṣaṣ* material, rather when he comes to discussing the Hidden Imām directly the shape of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s text changes radically. The first group of text to be presented following the *qiṣaṣ* material are *aḥādīth* in which the Hidden Imām is designated by the earlier imāms, as well as Fāṭima, Muḥammad and God. This is a vast body of narrations presented in fourteen chapters, that are together far more extensive than the *qiṣaṣ* material, with fifty-seven *aḥādīth* narrated from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq alone. This massive, repetitive mode of presentation, adducing long sequences of *aḥādīth* in which is repeated the same basic information (that there will be twelve imāms following Muḥammad and that the twelfth and last will enter occultation pending his return as the *qā'im*) is utterly

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<sup>457</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 231.

<sup>458</sup> *Naṣṣ* had long been a cornerstone of Imāmī imāmology. An imām was known to be the imām on the basis of his infallibility and knowledge but also proof that he had been explicitly named successor by his predecessor. See *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 46.

different to what we encountered in the *qiṣaṣ* material, the intense diversity of which contains not a single report supported by multiple narrations. We have moved to *tawātur*, these *naṣṣ* texts embodying al-Ṣadūq's introductory claims that the reality of the Hidden Imām is proven by an irrefutable volume textual witnesses.

The sense of *tawātur* effect by these reports (and with it the divergence between their presentation and that of the *qiṣaṣ* material) is all the stronger for their content's being focussed on a tightly limited set of contentions. The actual events and details of the Twelfth Imām's career, including those of his occultation, such as might be compared illuminatingly to the *qiṣaṣ* material, have yet to appear. These reports instead concentrate only on asserting that the Twelfth Imām's status as the final imām and the *qā'im* have been foretold and sanctioned by his predecessors. A further difference between these texts and the *qiṣaṣ* material is al-Ṣadūq's dividing these *naṣṣ* texts according to their sources (allotting separate chapters to reports from each of the imāms, Muḥammad and so on), a further device to underscore the density of transmission of these reports.<sup>459</sup>

In these two very different bodies of *aḥādīth* and the two very different ways in which al-Ṣadūq presents them to the reader we see in practice the two different types of proof outlined in *Kamāl al-dīn*'s introduction. The *qiṣaṣ* texts place no particular emphasis on their sources, their focus being rather on producing as many diverse and engaging images of previous occulted *hujaj* as possible. The *naṣṣ* text, by contrast, focus on the extended repetition of a very narrow set of contentions, behind which are amassed a prodigious array of sources to which al-Ṣadūq endeavours to draw the reader's attention. It is quite plain from their stark divergence that al-Ṣadūq is under no illusions regarding the different character of his two probative strategies, and that he is here compiling different sets of texts, each with one strategy in mind at the expense of the other.

There are already indications that these proofs may not coexist entirely comfortably. On the one hand, while the *qiṣaṣ* texts evidence none of the strategies employed in the *naṣṣ* texts to affirm *tawātur*, it cannot be denied that their separate probative strategy cannot function without some of that same affirmation of textual reliability. Though they work as prefigurations of the Hidden Imām in distant the past rather than as corroborated witnesses to his existence, these *qiṣaṣ* texts do not work if they are not believed to be reliable. If we are to

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<sup>459</sup> It is significant that this specific contention of the *tawātur* of texts predicting and designating the Twelfth Imām's special status has a precedent in al-Nu'mānī, who makes exactly the same contention with texts on the same particular subject the focus of his *Kitāb al-ghayba* some decades before al-Ṣadūq (al-Nu'mānī, pp. 97-140). We have, moreover, already seen al-Ṣadūq draw on this exact same group of *aḥādīth* as a powerful textual proof elsewhere in his writings. See above, and particularly *al-Khiṣāl*, p. 523 (where al-Ṣadūq in fact directs the interested reader to *Kamāl al-dīn* for further information).

acknowledge that the events of Moses' occultation must be repeated in that of the Twelfth Imām, we need to first be sure that Moses' occultation did, indeed, take place as described.

### **DALĀLA – *Seeking the Imām***

After wading through al-Ṣadūq's horde of *naṣṣ* texts we come to the chapters of *Kamāl al-dīn* which describe the actual events of the Hidden Imām's preternaturally long life, starting with his birth, and focussing thereafter on his shadowy relationship with the faithful who seek his guidance. As we reach the Twelfth Imām himself, we reach both the figure whose existence the preceding *naṣṣ* texts guarantee and the figure whose exploits the *qiṣaṣ* texts must prefigure. This, then, is the shared object whereat al-Ṣadūq's two proof-corpora and their accompanying probative logics meet. As al-Ṣadūq's strategies converge on their goal, there is certainly an extent to which we encounter a Hidden Imām who is all the more real for having thus been proven by multiple means. This convergence, however, is not immune from the tensions between al-Ṣadūq's two proofs. The reader soon finds that *tawātur* and 'Whatsoever befell...' are not easily cumulative, and it is not immediately obvious whether al-Ṣadūq's picture of the Twelfth Imām will be more or less than the sum of its parts.

The texts that al-Ṣadūq now presents, which may be usefully termed 'occultation texts' – texts whose primary subject matter is the Twelfth Imām and his occultation – are divided into four chapters: a brief chapter concerning the imām's mother, a slightly longer one giving stories of his birth and then two very long chapters, the first collecting accounts of those who actually saw the imām and even spoke with him, and the second giving accounts of the many letters that the imām sent to the faithful through the medium of his emissaries during the nearly seventy years of the minor occultation.

The potential parallels that the reader may draw between these occultation texts and the *qiṣaṣ* material at the book's opening are too numerous and varied to list in comprehensive detail. We have alluded to many above and will discuss several more in depth below. As for *tawātur*, we see a number of sustained elements in the occultation texts' presentation that aims to affirm their textual integrity. As is the case with the *naṣṣ* texts, volume is evidently an important factor in these chapters' presentation of their material, with twenty-four reports being supplied for eyewitness accounts of the imām and forty-two records of letters received from him. Al-Ṣadūq meanwhile supplies a comprehensive list of those who saw the Imām, which gives



sixty-five names in total.<sup>460</sup> Recalling again al-Ṣadūq's pronouncement that three corroborating reports constitutes *tawātur*, this is a considerable body of evidence and one that is designed to impress. To reject such a wealth of reports, al-Ṣadūq has repeatedly told the reader, can only be consistent as part of a total rejection of textual evidence and thus the foundation of all religion. Further efforts to emphasise the textual reliability of the chapters' assembled accounts are visible in the adducing of multiple *asānīd* for some of the traditions. Al-Ṣadūq is clearly investing effort in convincing his reader that the events of recent history that he describes really did happen.

A key element of this assertion of factuality is the concept of the *dalāla*; the 'sign' or 'proof'.<sup>461</sup> A *dalāla* in Islamic literature often refers to a miracle by which the Prophet proves his prophetic status, and indeed there proliferated in the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries a literature of 'The Signs of Prophecy' (*dalā'il al-nubuwwa*) devoted to documenting these prophetic miracles.<sup>462</sup> In Imāmī literature, meanwhile, the *dalāla* often denotes a miraculous sign of the imām's legitimacy and, in the case of the Twelfth Imām, these signs of his legitimacy merge with signs of his very existence. By the time al-Ṣadūq was writing there was already an established Imāmī literature chronicling the *dalā'il* of the imāms including those of the Twelfth Imām,<sup>463</sup> and it is little surprise that the concept appears in abundance in *Kamāl al-dīn*'s occultation texts, where the term *dalāla* is used with a self-conscious specificity. Many of al-Ṣadūq's narrators tell in their accounts of how they came to meet the imām or to receive his written word how they were searching for a *dalāla* in order to strengthen their faith, while al-Ṣadūq himself on occasion intervenes after a report to explain to the reader what constituted the *dalāla* therein.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 470-471.

<sup>461</sup> The two instinctive translations of this term correlate eerily with al-Ṣadūq's two probative methods, his use of *dalāla* shifting between 'sign' and 'proof' in different contexts. When *tawātur* is emphasised the *dalāla* appears as proof, the miracle by which the imām is confirmed as such. Elsewhere in *Kamāl al-dīn*, however, we see the faithful in search of 'signs' of the imām, such as might direct them towards him.

<sup>462</sup> Prominent examples of this *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* genre include works by 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī (d. 415/1024), Abū Nu'aym, al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038) and Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066).

<sup>463</sup> al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī* and al-Khuṣaybī's *al-Hidāya al-kubrā* both feature extensive collections of reports identified as the imāms' *dalā'il*. See al-Kulaynī, vol. i, pp. 439-525 (though these chapters are usually collected under the heading 'The chapters concerning history' (*abwāb al-tārīkh*) and present what purports to be a chapter on the birth of each of the imāms, in each case the majority of the chapter is given over to accounts of the imām's miracles, often explicitly identified as *dalā'il*). In each of *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*'s fourteen chapters (one for each imām, Muḥammad and Fatima), meanwhile, a brief set of material detailing the subject's dates, parentage etc. is followed by the bulk of the chapter which is presented under the rubric 'And there were amongst his/her signs...'

<sup>464</sup> E.g. *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 515 (h. 9), 521, 528 (h. 28).

The *dalā'il* in *Kamāl al-dīn* are particularly concentrated in the accounts of believers' epistolary encounters with the imām after the death of al-ʿAskarī.<sup>465</sup> These take place in the context of the minor occultation, when Imāmīs could still consult with individuals identified as the Hidden Imām's appointed emissary, through whom the imām would send written messages and instructions to his followers.<sup>466</sup> What is noteworthy about these accounts is that while the accounts in the chapter of personal encounters with the imām hinge for the most part on the simple fact of meeting the imām, the same is not true of the epistolary encounters. The receipt of a letter is not enough to constitute a *dalāla*, rather there must be some miraculous element to the story. We have in al-Kashshī and al-Kulaynī examples of reports in which a believer corresponds with the imām without any wondrous occurrence,<sup>467</sup> but such reports are absent from the collection al-Ṣadūq offers here. There are a number of stock patters which the miracles follow, the majority of which revolve around the Hidden Imām's powers of premonition (*ibtidā'*). Again and again we read how a believer receives instructions in a letter which make no sense at the time but in hindsight prove miraculously perspicacious. Elsewhere we read of how Imāmīs write to the imām but for one reason or another omit certain queries from their letters, only to have them answered anyway by an imām who does not need a letter to know what is in his shī'a's hearts.<sup>468</sup>

Al-Ṣadūq's narration of this body of material is not without its risks. Most scholarly groups at that time, foremost amongst them the Mu'tazilīs, did not accept that anyone after the Prophet could perform miracles. This being the case, these compiled *dalā'il* of the imāms have the perilous potential to read as accounts of the impossible,<sup>469</sup> doing serious damage to the credibility of al-Ṣadūq's contentions. On the other hand, if al-Ṣadūq's assertions of *tawātur* are successful such that the reader has no choice but to accept that the events described in

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<sup>465</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 509-549.

<sup>466</sup> See Chapter I. Though it is true that al-Ṣadūq's material does conform to the division between major and minor occultations in many ways, it is not a distinction that he explicitly asserts with any force. This is in contrast to both the earlier al-Nu'mānī and the later al-Ṭūsī, and, as we shall see below, the tacit acknowledgement of the distinction between occultations without directly declaring it, thus allowing that distinction to blur, well suits al-Ṣadūq's objectives.

<sup>467</sup> It should be remarked that in al-Kulaynī's case the report in question is not in his chapter on the Twelfth Imām's *dalā'il* but in a chapter regarding *khums*. For him too, it seems, the mere presence of a letter does not constitute a miracle, rather acts as a legal proof like any other imām's reported injunction. See al-Kulaynī, vol. i, p. 545, h. 12.

<sup>468</sup> For an alternative reading of the significance of these encounters see Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality*, pp. 431-460.

<sup>469</sup> While al-Ṣadūq has made it clear in his introduction that he is talking primarily to a Shī'ī readership, we need look no further than that same introduction to learn that there were Shī'ī, indeed Imāmī voices who shared the Mu'tazilī view on this matter. In one of al-Ṣadūq's long citations of ibn Qība al-Rāzī we see the latter state his view that the imāms cannot have knowledge of the unseen. See *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 140.

these texts did take place, these occultation texts become a powerful challenge to the Imāmīs' opponents. The stakes in these chapters' address, then, are high.

It is surprising, therefore, that alongside al-Ṣadūq's evident attempts to persuade the reader of these accounts' *tawātur* we also see a perilous quantity of self-evident weaknesses and problems in these chapters' assembled *aḥādīth*, weaknesses which far exceed such lapses as we observed in Chapter I and to which we saw al-Mufīd objecting. The collective state of these reports' *asānīd* lamentable, riddled as they are with defects that would be just as apparent to an unschooled reader as they would to one learned in the science of *aḥādīth*. Whatever the status of his wide set of narrators (a number of whom are quite unknown beyond their names), many of the reports are narrated from unidentified sources, sometimes identified generically such as by their place of origin but other times only as 'a man.'<sup>470</sup> Thus these crucial eyewitness testaments to the imām's existence do not always even identify the witness on whom they rely! In other instances the *aḥādīth*'s sources show less conventional defects. For example one of the reports of an encounter with the Hidden Imām begins as follows:

We heard the following from a shaykh from amongst the people of *ḥadīth* called Aḥmad b. Fāris al-Adīb: 'Once in Hamadān I heard a tale, which I told as I heard it to one amongst my brethren who asked that I set it down in writing. Finding no objection to this I did so, placing liability for the tale with the one who told it.

'I heard that in Hamadān there are a people called the Banū Rāshid, all of whom are Shī'īs, their creed that of the people of Imāmate. I asked the reason why they, of all the people of Hamadān, had become Shī'ī. An old man amongst them who seemed righteous and upright told me the following:

"The reason for this is that our grandfather from whom we trace our descent once set out for the Ḥajj..."<sup>471</sup>

This is clearly a far cry from the certainty usually promised by a conventional *isnād*, and places the text that follows it firmly in the realm of anecdote if not of legend.

Nor do the difficulties of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s occultation texts confine themselves to the question of sources. The reader must also contend with overt internal contradictions between *aḥādīth* as well as material that flies in the face of orthodoxy. Details such as the imām's age at the time of his father's death and his physical appearance<sup>472</sup> are recounted conspicuously differently in different reports. Meanwhile, a number of reports enact significant departures

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<sup>470</sup> E.g. *Kamāl al-dīn*, 463-4 (ḥ. 1, 4),

<sup>471</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 480.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 457, 474, 503.

from what was already the established Duodeciman narrative of the imamate, such as those claiming that the Twelfth Imām has a brother called Mūsā who shares his occultation with him, or that al-Ḥusayn designated not his son ‘Alī but his sister Zaynab as his successor.<sup>473</sup> Meanwhile, the occultation literature in these chapters is regularly punctuated by accounts of a starkly fantastical colour. While the imām’s epistolary *dalā’il*, confined as they are to a limited set of types, are certainly miraculous but not flamboyantly so (the imām’s power largely being restricted to that of ‘knowledge of the unseen’), the accounts of those who have met the *qā’im* expand the field considerably, describing such mysteries as letters rewriting themselves, the imām walking concealed amongst the people, and in one report the Hidden Imām tormenting his usurping uncle Ja‘far the liar by appearing out of thin air at distressing moments.<sup>474</sup> Not only does this inclusion of more colourful miracles court greater opposition from non-Imāmī groups opposed to the notion that non-prophets can perform miracles, it also casts the very existence of the Twelfth Imām as infused with the miraculous, leaving the reader who objects to such miracles little choice but to reject the imām’s existence.

It is hard to overemphasise the antagonism with which al-Ṣadūq’s inclusion of such fantastic reports is flirting. Such accounts epitomise the ‘ridiculous’ beliefs on account of which many of al-Ṣadūq’s contemporaries denigrate the Imāmīya, including Mu‘tazilīs and other rationalist-leaning groups but also Shī‘ī groups such as the Ismā‘īlīs who possess colourful imamological narratives of their own.<sup>475</sup> This hazard is meanwhile reflected in the circumspection with which al-Ṣadūq’s fellow Imāmīs treat such material. Al-Nu‘mānī totally excludes all such accounts from his discussion of the occultation, while al-Mufīd is careful to restrict his accounts to the imām’s power of foreknowledge.<sup>476</sup> More tellingly still, al-Ṣadūq himself is much more careful in other contexts. In *‘Uyūn*, a text that addresses itself to the ardently Mu‘tazilī ibn ‘Abbād, al-Ṣadūq not only restricts his long chapter on al-Riḍā’s *dalā’il* to instances of the imām’s miraculous foreknowledge, he makes sure to clarify that this knowledge is not afforded by miraculous powers of the imam, rather it is merely passed down from the Prophet.<sup>477</sup> No such caveat appears in *Kamāl al-dīn*, rather the imām portrayed in these chapters is a thoroughly and unapologetically miraculous figure.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., pp. 474-476, 528.

<sup>474</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 467, 470, 549.

<sup>475</sup> Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Ifitāḥ al-Da‘wa* p. 24

<sup>476</sup> Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, pp. 355-367. We shall see how al-Mufīd further underplays the epistemological importance of such miraculous accounts. As for the imāms’ capacity to perform miracles, al-Mufīd cautiously accepts it on the basis of reports to that effect, while conceding that the matter can neither be proven or disproven by reason, and also noting that even as a minority of Mu‘tazilīs share his acceptance of the phenomenon some Imāmīs do not. See McDermott, pp. 107-119.

<sup>477</sup> *‘Uyūn* vol. ii, p. 224. We have, of course, already seen al-Ṣadūq contend with such opposition in *Kamāl al-dīn*’s introduction. See above.

The state of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s occultation narratives, with their weak sources and extravagant content, thus appears emphatically and needlessly inimical to al-Ṣadūq's vital claims of *tawātur*. While some of these difficulties might be attributed to the state of the texts al-Ṣadūq had available, the fact that we see other Imāmīs of the period, including the earlier compilations of al-Nu'mānī and al-Kulaynī, assemble traditions about the Hidden Imām wherein such problematic elements are less in evidence<sup>478</sup> tells us that al-Ṣadūq is not only a victim of circumstance here. He could vet his material more thoroughly, as he does in many other works, but instead he includes this uncharacteristically troublesome body of reports even alongside his vociferous claims of *tawātur*, claims that do not appear in compendia of his with more cautious contents. Why does al-Ṣadūq, having so invested *Kamāl al-dīn*'s arguments in establishing the *tawātur* of its contents, undermine himself so apparently avoidably?

### IMĀM, MOTIF AND MYTH

The answer to this question can only be that the advantages accrued by this textually and doctrinally problematic material outweigh its risks. This trade-off brings us back to the twofold proof at the heart of *Kamāl al-dīn*, for while his occultation material brings certain hindrances to al-Ṣadūq's assertions of *tawātur*, the form it takes is vital for the link that is created with the *qiṣaṣ* material. The way in which this works is not immediately obvious. After all, if we start from the first principles of al-Ṣadūq's plan of action, 'from the impossible to the possible,' the essential elements of the Twelfth Imām's occultation, which need to be proved possible by way of establishing precedent in the careers of previous prophets, are few and simple: God's *ḥujja* needs to be hidden and he needs to live a long time. Both of these phenomena are in generous evidence in al-Ṣadūq's selection of *qiṣaṣ* material, and as far the occultation material is not concerned he need only adduce reports in which these elements are illustrated. This, too, he has evidently done in abundance, an abundance which in part appears motivated by the aspiration to *tawātur*. Thus far none of this creates a need for luminously troublesome material; there are plenty of narrations available with which al-Ṣadūq could affirm these two miraculous idiosyncrasies of the Hidden Imām without deviating from the more stable-looking corpora supplied by al-Kulaynī or even al-Mufīd. We imagine here a far simpler *Kamāl al-dīn*.

But simple *Kamāl al-dīn* is not. What brings the probative value of the *qiṣaṣ* material and the dubious quality of the occultation texts together is al-Ṣadūq's determination to go beyond the

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<sup>478</sup> See below

basic elements of the imām's occultation and longevity. Instead he creates a picture of the Twelfth Imām whose resonances with his juxtaposed image of the prophetic past are legion. To do this he needs a more colourful Twelfth Imām, and for this he needs a more colourful array of texts. We should recall the *ḥadīth* that underpins al-Ṣadūq's use of the *qīṣaṣ*: that whatsoever has befallen previous communities shall befall Muḥammad's community. Here is a paradigm that enjoins to the reader to absorb the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, with all their wonders, their jellyfish being ridden by bees and little furry people with asymmetrical ears, as an authoritative blueprint for the present. It is an implication of his mechanism that al-Ṣadūq fully and creatively embraces in his compiled occultation texts.

An illustrative example of this constructed, multifarious similarity is in what we may call the encounter narratives: the body of traditions among the occultation texts which suggest that, despite the Imām's occultation, the true believer is still afforded the chance of a meeting with him (as distinct from those narratives in which a believer sees the imām prior to the occultation). It is with these narrative that al-Ṣadūq's occultation material is at its most colourful and evocative. In the world of *Kamāl al-dīn* Western Asia is awash with pious Shī'īs tirelessly seeking a sign from their vanished Imām, and who, beckoned by a mysterious messenger in the night, attracted by a light at a solitary window or even confronted by an astonishing, glittering city in the desert, are eventually rewarded with an audience. The details of their conversations with the imām are seldom the focus of these stories, rather it is the heightened expectation of the search, the sudden, suspenseful hint of presence and the radiant majesty of the imām's revealed face.<sup>479</sup>

These narratives exist very much at the hazardous end of al-Ṣadūq's spectrum of occultation texts. Not only do they contain a wealth of fantastical and miraculous elements, their protagonists themselves sometimes mysterious figures from faraway places, but they enact a concept which even amongst the Imāmīya of al-Ṣadūq's time is highly controversial. Neither al-Mufīd nor al-Nu'mānī make any use of such narratives in their discussions of occultation, and both meanwhile expressly deny the possibility of meeting with the Hidden Imām. Al-Ṣadūq, meanwhile, undertakes to illustrate that possibility in glorious technicolour, and as he does so he opens up a wealth of resonance and cross-signification between his *qīṣaṣ* material and his image of the occultation, between the mythical narratives of the past and a present that is no less infused with the drama of revelation and concealment.

The most likely place to find the Hidden Imām (on the advice of al-Ṣadūq's material) is at Mecca, where every year he attends the Ḥajj. Many accounts affirming this aspect of the

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<sup>479</sup> Also significant is the air of mystery that this motif maintains about encounters with the imām. See below.

occultation repeat of the Imām ‘He sees them and yet they do not see him,’ establishing the powerful image of the Imām walking unrecognised amongst the people.<sup>480</sup> This image, meanwhile, is prefigured in al-Ṣadūq’s earlier chapter on the occultation of Joseph. Just as God kept Joseph’s brothers from recognising him even when they stood before him, so in the exact same way he can hide his Imām in plain sight amongst the pilgrims to the Ka‘ba. However, as al-Ṣadūq’s reader knows, Joseph was hidden neither entirely nor forever. His wicked brothers did not recognise him, but his righteous brother did, and al-Ṣadūq even goes out of his way in *Kamāl al-dīn* to argue (against the common grain of readings) that his father Jacob knew that he was alive, though he could not see him.<sup>481</sup> So it is that we find in the occultation texts narratives wherein the imām reveals himself to deserving pilgrims. The emissary al-‘Amrī saw him at Mecca, clinging to the Ka‘ba’s cover and crying, ‘O God avenge me upon my enemies.’<sup>482</sup>

In this instance the parallel between past and present is explicitly drawn by al-Ṣadūq, who spells out the points of similarity and their significance in his commentary on the traditions, but the vast majority of such similarities between multiple narratives are left implicit. A recurring figure in the encounter narratives is that of the seeker; the pious Shī‘ī at wandering at a loss at the story’s opening, searching for al-‘Askarī’s successor, news of the house of Muḥammad or even just ‘a sign’ (*dalāla*)).<sup>483</sup> One particularly colourful such figure is that of Abū Sa‘īd Ghānim al-Hindī (‘the Indian’). Inspired by reading the Torah in the court of the King of India, Abū Sa‘īd journeys across Asia in search of God’s last prophet. On encountering Sunnī Muslims in Kabul, he makes the mistake of informing them that the Prophet whom he seeks was rightfully succeeded by ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and the resulting antagonism nearly costs him his life. After a narrow escape, he gains access to a prudently secretive Shī‘ī who informs him of the truth, including that the Imamate is now held by Muḥammad’s *waṣī*, the Twelfth Imām, whom Abū Sa‘īd in turn successfully seeks out and at last meets.<sup>484</sup>

This account is strikingly similar to the story of Salmān the Persian given earlier in the *qīṣaṣ* section of the book. Salmān, too, begins his story in distant lands of unbelief, but is compelled to set out in search of God’s messenger following an encounter with a hidden and secret text.

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<sup>480</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 380 (h. 34), 385 (h. 49), 468 (hh. 7, 8).

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>482</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 468, h. 10. Though al-‘Amrī’s account is evocative, it should be noted that al-Ṣadūq’s material does not restrict sightings to the Imām’s emissaries.

<sup>483</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 473, (h. 19), 503-504, 513-514.

<sup>484</sup> Curiously, this narrative appears twice in modern editions of *Kamāl al-dīn*, once in the chapter on those who met the Hidden Imām and once, more incongruously, in the chapter on those who received written messages from him. Ghaffārī acknowledges this discrepancy in his edition, see *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 522.

Like Abū Saʿīd, Salmān's quest involves much trial and error, and he, too, must negotiate a mixture of many hostile unbelievers and a few secretive custodians of the truth. He has to learn from a succession of reclusive Christian teachers before at last the Prophet passes by the pillar in the desert on which he sits, and his patience and devotion are rewarded. Nor is Salmān alone in pursuing such a quest: al-Ṣadūq identifies the Prophet's status before his mission as analogous to the occultation, and he tells the stories of a number of less known figures, like king Tubba' and Saṭīḥ the priest,<sup>485</sup> who also set out, guided by scripture, inspiration and provenance, to seek news of God's last messenger, to await him and even to find him, even as he subsequently narrates those of Shī'īs who set out to find the last Imām. In the more distant past, Solomon appears in a narrative of mysterious meetings that presents a remarkable fusion of Shī'ī motifs of occultation and the night-time wanderings of Harūn al-Rashīd in *One Thousand and One Nights*. Secluded from his shī'a with his new bride, Solomon is compelled to walk the city in disguise to run a series of errands at his beloved's bequest. On one occasion he meets a fisherman who gives him a pair of fish without ever discovering that he is God's representative. On another occasion he brings his parents in law to dinner, and only once they have eaten their fill does he reveal his true identity as king and prophet with a display of magical power.<sup>486</sup> A little later in his encounter narratives, al-Ṣadūq supplies many testimonies to the effect that his readers, too, can never be sure than an unsolicited invitation may not bring them before their Imām. 'He sees them though they do not see him.'<sup>487</sup>

These devout Shī'ī wanderers' very desire to seek out the Imām or confirmation of his existence is couched in the precedent of earlier prophets. Al-Ṣadūq makes much of the episode in the Qur'ān when Abraham asks God to show him his power to bring the dead to life.<sup>488</sup> 'Do you not believe?' Chides the Almighty, to which Abraham responds, 'Only let my heart be set at rest.' (Q 2:260) God, of course, indulges Abraham's weakness, miraculously restoring to life four dead birds. This Qur'ānic proof-text lends a robust blueprint for the encounter narrative, but it also gives a knowing nod to the transgressive nature of al-Ṣadūq's inclusion of these texts. In citing Abraham's request for God's indulgence, seeking tangible proof when he should not need to, al-Ṣadūq engages those Imāmī authorities who deny that the believer can still meet his imām face to face and thus would deny the validity of these encounter narratives. He draws on divine precedent to justify setting the believers' hearts at rest, even if it means breaking the rules.

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<sup>485</sup> E.g. *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 202-203, 223-227.

<sup>486</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 188-190

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 462-506.

<sup>488</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 463.



In al-Ṣadūq's encounter narratives we see how this most controversial corpus, whilst undermining *Kamāl al-dīn*'s claims to *tawātur*, supply potent ammunition to al-Ṣadūq's efforts to show how perfectly the prophetic past is mirrored in the imāmī present. The extent of al-Ṣadūq's devotion to asserting this equivalence as fully as possible is meanwhile visible in the fact that just as it compels him to admit weaknesses in the occultation material, it also drives the introduction of heterodox texts into his original set of *qiṣaṣ*. Few doctrines concerning prophets are as dear to the Imāmīya than that of infallibility, however in the very first story of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s main text, that of Idrīs, we see a narrative whose prophet protagonist is definitely imperfect. Idrīs is angry with his community for rejecting his message, and therefore refuses to ask God to send them rain. As their suffering escalates, God rebukes Idrīs for his spite, at which Idrīs repents and at last makes the necessary prayer.<sup>489</sup> The image of the prophet in his cave, delaying the people's final salvation for wrath at their sins, is a valuable echo of the Hidden Imām, indefinitely absent and supremely wronged, but also threatens to damage a staple element of the Imāmī concept of prophecy. In *al-Tawhīd* we see a more cautious al-Ṣadūq taking pains to explain away reports that might destabilise the infallibility of the prophets and imāms,<sup>490</sup> but here in *Kamāl al-dīn* he lets this heterodoxy pass without comment, compelled by its value to a more important project.

More conspicuous still is al-Ṣadūq's Janus-faced negotiation of the concept of a 'hiatus' (*fatra*) between prophets. God, the good Imāmī may be absolutely assured, does not leave his creation without *hujja*, even for a heartbeat, lest it implode in meaningless futility, a doctrine that precedes al-Ṣadūq by decades if not centuries.<sup>491</sup> Conversely, in *Kamāl al-dīn* we read that the world endured for a whole week without a *hujja* after the death of the prophet Ṣāliḥ.<sup>492</sup> Meanwhile, we have seen the book's extensive coverage of the gap between Jesus and Muḥammad, a gap that is fruitfully populated by with seeker figures like Salmān, Saṭīḥ the priest and Joseph the Jew.<sup>493</sup> Such characters are the perfect simulacrum of the Shī'ī awaiting the Twelfth Imām, however it is hard to overstate the affront which this motif of the long, *hujja*-less night that they inhabit represents to Imāmī theology. The idea that there was a gap in the succession of prophets is a and common and long-standing one in Muslim literature, but when it comes to the Imāmīya such a gap is the starkest of theological anathema. It is, of course, a highly useful doppelganger for the Hidden Imām's occultation, especially in terms of the narratives it generates, but not only is the admission that there was such a gap a near-

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<sup>489</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 158-164.

<sup>490</sup> E.g. *al-Tawhīd*, p. 128.

<sup>491</sup> It is certainly present in force in *al-Kāfi* (al-Kulaynī, vol. i, pp. 178-179) several decades earlier, attested in *aḥādīth* that may well be much older.

<sup>492</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 169.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 194-232.

fatal compromise for the same Imāmī theology that asserts that there must, indeed, be an imām, but there is also a risk in pushing the similarity between *fatra* and *ghayba* too far. After all, the occultation of the imām is not, as Duodeciman scholars including al-Ṣadūq never tire of asserting, the same as his absence. He is still there, the sun behind the clouds, guiding the community even though they do not know it. ‘He sees them and yet they do not see him.’ The implication of these narratives of the *fatra* that the occultation is effectively identical to a complete absence of a *ḥujja* is a risky admission to toy with!<sup>494</sup>

Sure enough, al-Ṣadūq does not, ultimately, let such a critical theological problem slide. He includes in *Kamāl al-dīn* a discussion the ‘gap’ spanning several pages, wherein he denounces the idea as impossible, producing a standard array of the imāms’ *aḥādīth* affirming that the world shall not be without a *ḥujja* until it comes to an end, and clarifying that it is only messengers, those prophets like Muḥammad and Moses who bring new laws, whose presence is punctuated by gaps. The prophets and their successors (*waṣīy*) who exist between the messengers may, of course, be forced to hide from persecution, but that, of course, is perfectly legitimate and quite incomparable to absence. Al-Ṣadūq specifically addresses the suggested *fatra* between Jesus and Muḥammad, naming the successors of Jesus who continued his message after him and also assembling reports of prophets who were active in between Jesus and Muḥammad, such as one Khālīd b. Sinān al-‘Abbāsī, whose daughter later met with Muḥammad who saluted her as the child of a prophet.<sup>495</sup>

As rigorous as this disavowal of the *fatra* is, our suspicions must be aroused by the fact that it is not allotted a chapter, let alone appended to the extensive set of narratives about the *fatra* near to *Kamāl al-dīn*’s beginning. Rather the discussion is postponed to the very end of *Kamāl al-dīn* and is to be found hidden between other material in the book’s concluding miscellany (*nawādir*). There is, moreover, no attempt to achieve coherence between the discussion of Salmān and of Jesus’ successors that figures in al-Ṣadūq’s ultimate refutation of the *fatra* and the descriptions of these figures in the *qīṣaṣ* section. There is, moreover, no mention of the aforementioned seven-day hiatus in the *ḥujja*’s presence after the death of Ṣāliḥ. It is plain that al-Ṣadūq is not overeager for the reader to heed this disavowal of the *fatra* as he reads stories about it. Rather, this relegation of the concept’s disavowal to the obscurity of the very end of the book shows us just how inconvenient it is. al-Ṣadūq must include a refutation of the *fatra* to cover himself, but it is both included and emasculated, secreted in a chapterless jumble of reports at the other end of the book where it cannot trouble the reader’s appreciation of the

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<sup>494</sup> It is significant, both regarding al-Ṣadūq’s use of these texts and their probable sources, that other Imāmī groups seem to have believed that God could remove his *ḥujja* if angered. See al-Nawbakhtī, *Fīraq al-shī’a*, p. 87.

<sup>495</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 684-688.

*fatra* as a highly fertile context in which to prefigure the drama of the occultation. However theologically difficult the *fatra* is, the stories which it yields up are just too useful to let go. Once again, we have problematic material that al-Ṣadūq sanctions in *Kamāl al-dīn* for the purpose of creating ever more evocative and numerous points of contact between the Twelfth Imām and his prophetic predecessors. This is not a case of adjusting one corpus the better to fit the other, rather both the occultation corpus and the *qiṣaṣ* corpus are enhanced and expanded to create as rich a field of correspondence as possible.

The correspondences we have seen thus far are of two types: there is the correspondence between the prophets and the Hidden Imām, and there is the correspondence between those non-prophetic seeker figures like Salmān and the Shī‘a. *Kamāl al-dīn* is not limited to such simple equivalences, however. Rather than presenting a single story that forever repeats itself, we instead see narrative elements that shift and transmute between stories, sometimes with improbable results. Let us return again to Salmān seeking his absent prophet. Prior to his reaching Muḥammad Salmān’s teachers are, inevitably, Christians, Christians, moreover, of a monastic colour. They are hermits whom he has to see out in their seclusion, and he himself adopts their asceticism, such that when Muḥammad at last finds him he is, like saint Anthony of Egypt, fasting on top of a pillar in the desert.<sup>496</sup> The ascetic wanderer is a fertile model for the awaiting Imāmīya, and a fittingly frequent sight in *Kamāl al-dīn*. The model becomes more complex, however, when we see that these ascetic wanderers are as often as not the hidden *hujja* himself rather than those seeking them. The Jesus of the Gospels spent forty days in the desert, an image that al-Ṣadūq’s material echoes, referring to his occultations ‘when he wandered the lands.’<sup>497</sup> Meanwhile, we read that when Joseph was hidden from his people he remained for ten years celibate and unanointed with oil or kohl, clearly colouring the imām figure’s absence from his people as a sojourn in the wilderness.<sup>498</sup> Seeker and imām meet inextricably in the figure of Alexander, (‘the Horned One’). Alexander here is a king who would leave his royal duties to seek adventure, a desire which his subjects, like Khosrow’s ministers in the *Shāh nāmāh*,<sup>499</sup> fruitlessly entreat him not to indulge. They are left unmistakably in the guise of the bewildered Shī‘a robbed of their Imām, but Alexander meanwhile appears less as a Messiah waiting to return than as one seeking enlightenment himself:

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid., pp. 194-198

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>499</sup> Firdowsī, *Shāh nāmāh*, lines 2635-2699.

Alexander was once journeying through the world when he came upon an old man who was examining the skulls of the dead. He bade his soldiers halt and called out, 'Old man! Why is it that you are examining these skulls?'

'I am trying to tell,' replied the old man, 'Which of them belonged to high-ranking persons and which to the lowly. Yet I cannot tell, though I have been examining them these twenty years!'

Alexander took his leave and journeyed on. 'It was for me and none other that he meant those words,' Said he as he went.<sup>500</sup>

We still see the hubristic conqueror, whose experiences as he journeys will ultimately avail him wisdom. Alexander is unmistakably both Imām who leaves his followers and Shī'ī searching for the hidden truth. No less a figure than Abraham is found in similar mould. Following his more conventional encounter with Nimrūd, where he is, like Moses and like the imām, hidden from a tyrant as a child, al-Ṣadūq tells us that Abraham also had a second occultation 'in which he wandered the world alone that he might reflect.' On the edge of the sea he encounters an old man praying, praying, as it turns out, for God to let him see his great prophet Abraham. He is duly pleased to learn that his prayer has been granted. Abraham, it seems, has been hidden from one shī'a only to appear to another, but he is clearly as bewildered as anyone else by the experience. Prophet again merges with seeker, discovering the old man from beyond the sea in a motif older than both Alexander and Abraham.<sup>501</sup>

*Kamāl al-dīn* never softens its contention that the absence and return of the *ḥujja* and the patient endurance of his followers are of paramount importance in the ever-repeating narrative of revelation that it weaves. But this does not entail the endless reiteration of a single paradigm. Rather what we see in the above is construction of a set of highly evocative and highly mobile motifs that refract across al-Ṣadūq's string of narratives, remoulding from context to context to beguile the reader as much by the variety of the forms they take as by their consistency. The fear of persecution which drives the Imām into hiding is the same fear which compels the devoted Shī'ī to secrecy. Meanwhile, one prophet's occultation may double up as a Christ-like sojourn in the wilderness, mirroring in turn the secluded, ascetic expectation of the Shī'ī faithful.

The results of al-Ṣadūq's compiling are gloriously entertaining, but this cannot in itself be enough to justify what remains a jarring threat to his need to project textual integrity in his portrayal of the Hidden Imām. For all the blatant weaknesses and compromises that he admits

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<sup>500</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 433.

<sup>501</sup> See for instance George, pp. 54-70.

in search of enriching narratives of wandering sages and hidden luminaries, the desire to affirm *tawātur* remains simultaneously tenacious. No less outlandish a story than that of Abū Saʿīd the Indian is presented by a prodigious amassing of *asānīd* and authorities asserting its truth.<sup>502</sup> Al-Ṣadūq remains committed to the *tawātur* that he identifies in his introduction as so essential to the doctrine of the Hidden Imām, and we must therefore enquire to what purpose he is willing to undercut it so damagingly. Entertainment is not reason enough. Why is *Kamāl al-dīn*'s shifting labyrinth of images so indispensable?

We may begin to answer this question by considering the potential of al-Ṣadūq's kaleidoscopic vision of the occultation to soften and domesticate the soteriological nightmare of the Imām's absence. Cast as a theological problem, the absence or hiddenness of God's single inspired guide to his creation is catastrophic. God can never leave his creation without a *ḥujja*, and what use is an imām whom the believers can neither consult nor even see? We need only recall what we saw in the first chapter of how core Imāmī epistemologies in the tenth century are still deeply invested in the ideal of a present imām to realise the difficulty of confronting that imām's absence. Correspondingly the available theological solutions to the imām's absence are inconclusive at best. While later authors will settle on such highly abstract, impressionistic dicta as the Hidden Imām's guidance being like the light of the sun behind a cloud,<sup>503</sup> al-Ṣadūq offers no one explanation, but prefers to settle on the inclement injunction that one cannot question God's wisdom. What *Kamāl al-dīn* tries to do is illustrate that wisdom. Plumbing the depths of millennia of storytelling to spin around the occultation a fertile intertext of wonders, al-Ṣadūq uses the evocative power of his assembled narratives and leitmotifs to sidestep the theological. *Kamāl al-dīn* meets the trauma of the imām's absence head-on, not by reasoning it away but by valorising the romance of hidden guidance and sought authority in an irresistible tapestry of adventure and discovery, which is meanwhile imbued and joined with many fundamental topoi of Islamic prophetological and hagiographic literature. The occultation ceases to be a horrendous epistemological paradox and instead becomes a glorious vista of tireless believers seeking the truth, solving puzzles and overcoming tyrants. The original command to await the Imām patiently is blurred with the notion that he walks unseen among us, with the notion that he, too, expects in ascetic anguish, with the apparent possibility of meeting him, with the adventures one may encounter on the way to doing so and even with the heroic wanderlust of Alexander.

The value of this device is that it allows al-Ṣadūq's instructions to the reader to work on the level of suggestion rather than committed doctrinal or historical assertions. The architecture

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<sup>502</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 465-468.

<sup>503</sup> See for instance al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ghayba*, pp. 27, 59-61.

of al-Ṣadūq's compilation creates a space where history is collapsed into a fusion of the sacred, prophetic past and the equally sacred, imāmic present. The reader is neither entirely in one place nor the other, rather al-Ṣadūq encourages him by his constant created resonances to inhabit an imaginative space between the two, actively abstracting myths and archetypes from the material that al-Ṣadūq offers. To take the example of the figure of 'the seeker' discussed above, which not only allows wildly heterodox equation of the Shī'ī's experience of the occultation with that of the imām, but relies on theologically problematic concepts like that of the *fatra* to do so, this figure appears not in any one text but rather in the myriad meeting points between texts, be they the stories of the prophets or the stories of the Hidden Imām. It is in this intangible mythic space that al-Ṣadūq creates – or rather bids the reader create – his image of the Hidden Imām, an image that can offer the reader solutions to the psychological and epistemological challenges of the occultation, by turns explanatory and comforting, which it would be hazardous for to articulate as straightforward doctrinal statements. Al-Ṣadūq's peculiar array of texts thus avails him and his reader not only a far richer set of solutions to the occultation but solutions which are textually and theologically unassailable, occurring as they do not in what is said to have happened but only in what it is suggested – through the compiler's careful *bricolage* – might be happening, in an ever-present mythic drama as old as history.<sup>504</sup>

## CHANGING HISTORY

Al-Ṣadūq's brilliant if eccentric designs in *Kamāl al-dīn* have a clear use in meeting the conceptual challenges of occultation, but they also respond to the doctrine's mechanical difficulties as experienced by al-Ṣadūq and his contemporaries. These become clear when we compare *Kamāl al-dīn*'s approach to the other surviving works on the occultation from the fourth/tenth century. Such a survey reveals that while the methods of *Kamāl al-dīn* are certainly unusual, they respond to a concern that is common to other authors of the period. This is the pervasive and deep-seated unease amongst Imāmī scholars regarding the viability of the proof-texts for the Twelfth Imām's existence and occultation. By the time al-Ṣadūq is writing the whole corpus of these occultation texts has come to be viewed as deeply

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<sup>504</sup> This concept of myth and mythography, understood as the creation and manipulation of images and motifs that have a particularly pervasive and semantically fertile presence in a given literary context, has been explored in the context of Abbasid literature with particular regard to ibn 'Abd Rabbih in Bray, 'Abbasid Myth'.

problematic by other Imāmīs, the sustainability of its being used as a proof at all being cast in serious doubt.

Let us look first to al-Mufīd's *Kitāb al-irshād*. Writing at the very end of the tenth century or the beginning of the eleventh, al-Mufīd writes at the start of his chapter on the twelfth Imām that while there follows a selection of eyewitness accounts of the Hidden Imām's birth, these are not a necessary proof of his existence. Instead, certainty in this matter is to be attained by theological arguments.<sup>505</sup> This could scarcely be a more dramatic departure from al-Ṣadūq's insinuations on *tawātur*. al-Ṣadūq declares the textual record strong enough to constitute certain proof, al-Mufīd eschews such textual proof altogether. This is, moreover, quite unlike al-Mufīd's own comparison between his and al-Ṣadūq's methods in *Taṣḥīḥ*; there his criticisms and corrections are justified on the basis that they rest on stronger reasoning but also on more reliable proof-texts than those of his traditionist teacher.<sup>506</sup> What is it about the question of the Hidden Imām that leads him not to seek more reliable texts but instead to depart from text altogether?

Al-Mufīd's statement is all the more interesting for its being a deceptive hyperbole. Though he insists that the Hidden Imām's presence is proven without narrations, the rationale he gives for why this is so clearly requires an acceptance of the reality of certain events. al-Mufīd's reasoning runs as follows: we know that there has to be an imām, we know that the imām has to meet certain criteria, and we know that nobody alive whom we can see meets those criteria, therefore the imām must be hidden. We only know of one person who claims to be such an imām in hiding, and that is the son of al-ʿAskarī.<sup>507</sup> It is immediately apparent that, whatever al-Mufīd claims, this proof does require textual evidence. While it attempts to sidestep textual issues by stating that the very existence of the Twelfth Imām's claims is enough in the face of theological necessity to guarantee their veracity, this still presupposes some coherent corpus of texts. Moreover, it also hinges on the son of al-ʿAskarī being the only claimant, which was not, in fact, the case, with various Ismāʿīlī and Wāqifī groups contending the contrary. Al-Mufīd is thus implying the corpus asserting the son of al-ʿAskarī's claim does not, in fact, need only to exist however tenuously, but that it is qualitatively superior to those textual sources adduced by the Ismāʿīlīs and the Wāqifīs. Not only, then, is al-Mufīd distancing himself from textual evidence with unusual vigour, but he is doing so disingenuously, seeking to deny the extent that he still relies on this corpus. Such an approach indicates grave reservations about this same body of material that al-Ṣadūq claims is incontrovertible.

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<sup>505</sup> Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, vol. ii, pp. 342-343.

<sup>506</sup> See above.

<sup>507</sup> Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, vol. ii, pp. 342-343.

We meanwhile see a different but similarly radical refusal of al-Ṣadūq's proof-texts in al-Nu'mānī some decades earlier. Unlike al-Mufīd, al-Nu'mānī's treatment of the occultation is a solidly traditionist one. There are no extensive theological arguments, and all the key contentions are based on textual materials, alongside extensive assertions from al-Nu'mānī of the reliability of his sources. Quite extraordinarily, however, al-Nu'mānī does not narrate a single text evidencing any kind of contact with the Twelfth Imām. Not only are al-Ṣadūq's encounter narratives of mystical meetings with the imām during his occultation nowhere to be seen, there are no accounts of the receipt of letters from the imām, there are no accounts from witnesses who saw the imām during the lifetime of al-ʿAskarī, there are not even any reports of al-ʿAskarī designating his son as his successor. Al-Nu'mānī instead relies entirely on reports of earlier Imāms' designation of the Twelfth Imām, their predictions that there would be twelve imāms, and that the twelfth would be hidden. This is an approach that is no less tradition-centred than that of al-Ṣadūq, but it excludes a vast corpus of precisely those traditions that would seem to offer the most valuable evidence. While al-Nu'mānī vehemently rejects the possibility of anyone encountering the Imām while he is hidden,<sup>508</sup> thus implicitly rejecting those texts that describe such meetings (a rejection seconded by al-Mufīd, as noted above), this does not explain his exclusion of accounts from before al-ʿAskarī's death, even those recording such crucial events as the imām's birth or his father's naming him as his successor.

Al-Nu'mānī's rejection of this corpus is all the more surprising given that he was the student of al-Kulaynī, whose *al-Kāfī* contains a considerable body of such material. al-Kulaynī's corpus is a more sober one than al-Ṣadūq, excluding almost all accounts of believers actually meeting the imām, but he includes an assertive quantity of reports describing his designation by his father and chronicling the many *dalā'il* surrounding the Hidden Imām's letters to his followers.<sup>509</sup> Al-Nu'mānī cites al-Kulaynī's material on other topics regularly across his *Kitāb al-ghayba*, only rendering his exclusion of this corpus all the more enigmatic.

In both of these authors, then, we see two quite different expressions – one leaning towards dialectic theology and the other staunchly traditionist – of the same emphatic desire to distance proofs of occultation from what by all appearances seem to be its key proof texts. How is this aversion to be explained, even while al-Ṣadūq states in no uncertain terms that it is by these same textual proofs beyond all else that the occultation is rendered fact?

The start of an answer lies in what we have already observed concerning the problematic state of the proof-texts themselves. The two early corpora we have are those of al-Kulaynī and those

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<sup>508</sup> Al-Nu'mānī, pp. 13-14.

<sup>509</sup> Al-Kulaynī, vol. i, pp. 514-525.



of al-Ṣadūq himself (al-Nu‘mānī excluding all such material, while al-Mufīd’s texts in *al-Irshād* are all transmitted from al-Kulaynī). Though, as observed, in al-Ṣadūq’s larger assemblage the texts’ problems are more acute, both authors’ occultation texts share the same menaces of self-evidently faulty *asānīd*, contradictions and unorthodox content. It seems these problems are peculiarly endemic to the occultations texts, prompting authors to seek alternative means of proof.

Such concerns, however, are only part of the problem. There are also significant hindrances arising from the very nature of the task of proving the Twelfth Imām’s existence in the intellectual context of the tenth century, regardless of the available textual resources. Above all, in claiming that al-‘Askarī had indeed had a son, the Imāmīya were bound to assert the reality of an event in the recent past which most of the Muslim community simply did not believe had happened. The inherent difficulty of such a task must not be underestimated. The Imāmīs had to change history, and changing history in the Abbasid intellectual milieu was not easy task. Donner has noted the remarkable unanimity with which the early Islamic historical tradition agreed on the Muslim community’s narratives of origins, pointing to the great extent to which writers in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries were constrained from any attempt to generate new narratives by a redoubtable body of widely known earlier material.<sup>510</sup> Nowhere is this more visible than in Shī‘ī polemical endeavours. As sectarian identities solidified over the ninth and tenth centuries, with Sunnism settling ever more firmly on a narrative of four rightly guided caliphs and collectively unimpeachable companions, Shī‘ī beliefs were predicated on asserting a substantially different historical narrative, one of betrayal and frustration in which many of the figures whom Sunnīs held to be righteous had in fact reneged on the Prophet’s final commands. What we find in practice, however, is that even in this radical moral reshaping of the story of early Islam Shī‘īs had very little leeway to change the accepted sequence of events if they aspired to any kind of acceptability. We find *aḥādīth* in Shī‘ī collections performing such transformative insertions into the accepted narrative as the story that the Prophet’s ghost had visited Abū Bakr after his instigation of the caliphate, demanding that he relinquish the office to ‘Alī, only to be interrupted by ‘Umar who dissuaded Abū Bakr from acquiescing to God’s messenger’s request from beyond the grave on the grounds that this was merely witchcraft brought about by ‘Alī. Such unapologetically history-altering texts, however, were of little use outside the very small portion of the population who accepted them. Instead, polemics with the majority had to be constructed around events like *Ghadīr khum* the historical reality of which was broadly accepted.<sup>511</sup> What

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<sup>510</sup> Donner, pp. 286-287.

<sup>511</sup> See Dakake, pp. 33-48.

was contested were the details and the interpretations, even the exact meanings of the words spoken, rather than the events themselves.

When it came to the occultation, however, Imāmī scholarship was forced down a more hazardous path. In contending the reality of the Hidden Imām they were affirming the truth of momentous, miraculous events to a great majority of believers who did not believe that they ever happened.<sup>512</sup> Al-Ṣadūq's own discomfort with this task is visible in passages of *Kamāl al-dīn*, where he places conspicuous emphasis on affirming that the Abbasids themselves were convinced that al-ʿAskarī had had a son and made great, conspicuous and widely documented efforts to find that son after the eleventh imām's death.<sup>513</sup> The advantages of affirming such an event are clear: this is not the hidden interactions of inspired miracle-workers and select initiates, rather it is the generally observable actions of the none-too-subtle ruling powers, a real-world event to which al-Ṣadūq can then anchor the more esoteric elements of the occultation narrative. Advantageous though it may be, al-Ṣadūq's insistence that the Abbasid hunt for the imām is generally accepted fact does not mask its total absence from non-Imāmī histories. Even al-Masʿūdī, whose interests in Imāmī beliefs are nowhere clearer than when he notes the Twelfth Imām's birth as apparent fact, makes no mention of a dramatic Abbasid response.<sup>514</sup> Al-Ṣadūq is clearly trying to persuade the reader that these events are more acknowledged than they are, an effort that we must then read not as ignorance of this difficulty of changing history but rather as an attempt, however desperate, to overcome it.

This difficulty of making the occultation history is one and the same with the risks of violating the consensus identified by Stewart that we discussed in Chapter I. Stewart is referring primarily to institutions of law and jurisprudence, but as Donner shows the hazards of violating the historical consensus were no less acute. Moreover, these hazards were similarly compounded by the new circumstances of Buwayhid rule. Just as the new opportunities afforded Imāmī scholars to engage openly with the Sunnī majority exacerbated the imperative to form a school of law that could engage with the mainstream, so too we see in writings on

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<sup>512</sup> This is, of course, a situation quite unlike that of other Shīʿī groups at the time. Both the Ismāʿīlī Fāṭimids and the various Zaydī factions active in the tenth century identified their imāms as inescapably historical figures. Conversely, it is instructive to note how, even though the existence of the Fāṭimid caliphs or the various Zaydī imāms could not be denied, the establishment of their legitimising ʿAlid heritage was forever arduous. The genealogy of the Fāṭimids was directly challenged in the famous Baghdad manifesto. While no Zaydī imām constituted so great a threat as to merit comparable resistance from the Sunnī establishment, Zaydī discussions of their imāms and of imamology in general are distinguished by the effort they put into affirming the ʿAlid credentials even of such well-known figures as ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn. See Haider, *Introduction*, pp. 71-73.

<sup>513</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 76-77, 506.

<sup>514</sup> Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, vol. iv, p. 160.

the occultation across the period a desire to couch this unwieldy new history in discourses acceptable to as broad a readership as possible.

This is most evident in the attempt to several Imāmī authors on the topic to prove the Twelfth Imām's existence using Sunnī *aḥādīth*. We first see this in al-Nu'mānī, who in *Kitāb al-ghayba* vociferously draws the reader's attention to the presence of texts foretelling twelve successors to Muḥammad in the Sunnī corpus.<sup>515</sup> This same approach is adopted in a more concentrated fashion by two of al-Ṣadūq's students, whose works on the subject remain extant. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Khazzāz (d. c. 420/1030) in his *Kifāyat al-athar* and Aḥmad b. 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī (d. 401/1012) in his *Muqtaḍab al-athar* both set themselves the specific task of proving that the Prophet would be succeeded by twelve imāms using only Sunnī *aḥādīth*.<sup>516</sup> This density of works using the same approach with the same topic is a vivid further illustration of the sheer difficulty of contending the occultation, both in the face of a sceptical majority unwilling to accommodate versions of events not sanctioned by their own accepted corpora of texts and of a woefully sub-standard set of Imāmī proof texts. This is only emphasised further by al-Mufīd's decision to declare his total independence from a textual approach, a move that is echoed especially in al-Khazzāz and al-Jawharī, whose works abstain both from the Imāmī corpus and its unwieldy subject matter of the detailed events of the occultation, instead focussing on the basic assertion that there must be twelve imāms.

Al-Ṣadūq is in plentiful company in his decision in *Kamāl al-dīn* that there is a need to go beyond the *tawātur* of the Imāmī proof-texts. This, however, is where the similarity with his fellows ends, not least because despite his decision to diversify his probative strategies he still maintains the *tawātur* of the occultation texts as an assertive element of his argument. Moreover, whilst all four of the authors discussed above respond to their dissatisfaction with those texts' efficacy by vociferously brining their proofs of the occultation closer to the epistemological demands of the mainstream, shedding the proof-texts that we see used by al-Kulaynī and replacing them either with Sunnī texts or with theological argument al-Ṣadūq's response is entirely the opposite. He responds to the difficulty of the proof-texts by exacerbating their instabilities, collecting a carnivalesque of often textually dubious but highly evocative material that he juxtaposes not with *aḥādīth* accepted by more powerful scholarly trends but with a corpus drawn from the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, a corpus which enjoyed a wide currency but was little-used in legal-theological endeavours.

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<sup>515</sup> Al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba* pp. 65, 79-85.

<sup>516</sup> It should be emphasised that both of these authors, like al-Nu'mānī, focus on affirming more basic components such as the number of imāms being twelve, rather than the historical minutiae of the Twelfth Imām's birth and disappearance.

*Kamāl al-dīn* thus attempts a truly daring epistemological feat. Faced with a need to create probative force from a corpus that mainstream epistemologies condemned as weak, rather than find a different corpus he instead finds a different epistemology. The occultation texts score poorly in terms of their *asānīd*, so al-Ṣadūq simply taps into a resource in which they are more forthcoming: the sheer mythic fertility of the events they describe, and the diverse narrative wealth of mystery, drama and deferred salvation they contain. Al-Ṣadūq exploits an aspect of the corpus that to other authors is part of what renders the texts unusable: their far-fetched stories and internal contradictions. These in al-Ṣadūq's hands only allow more expansion and cross-fertilisation of the narrative motifs with which he embeds the occultation so powerfully in the long count of sacred history.<sup>517</sup> Not only does *Kamāl al-dīn* attempt to bypass the question of authenticity, it embraces and exploits precisely all that is blurred and unstable in the occultation literature to transcend problems of authenticity and arrive at a paradigm which is instead driven by plurality and mutability.<sup>518</sup>

## SECRECY

Not only does al-Ṣadūq take advantage of the same diversities and inconsistencies in the occultation texts that his contemporaries find problematic, he weaves the very notion of textual

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<sup>517</sup> The decades which separate his situation from al-Mufīd are another significant actor: writing only a century after the death of al-ʿAskarī and less than half a century after the death of al-Sammarī, the Twelfth Imām's last emissary, al-Ṣadūq is still discussing living memory. The reception of letters from the Imām or his emissary was still a lived experience of elements of the Imāmī community, and the addressing of these encounters was surely essential to Imāmī discussion of the twelfth Imām. Al-Mufīd's departure may well reflect a different attitude to traditions, but it also reflects new possibilities afforded by the passage of time. Only once the occultation became more distantly remembered as event could it become an abstracted concept in the hands of theologians, whose property it would remain for ever after. This was a luxury that al-Ṣadūq did not have.

His response to the still relatively new reality of the major occultation is, it seems, to blur the boundaries between the Imām's presence and absence as emphatically as possible. It is interesting in this respect to note Ghaemmaghami's observation that in his discussions of occultation beyond *Kamāl al-dīn* (e.g. in *al-I'tiqādāt*) al-Ṣadūq is conspicuously evasive regarding the question of whether or not the Hidden Imām may ever be seen. See Ghaemmaghami, pp. 142-145.

In both authors, meanwhile, this is restricted to the context of the minor occultation, when epistolary correspondence with the Imām through his emissary was at the centre of the Imāmī community's workings. Al-Kulaynī, of course, knew nothing else, while nearly a century later in the writings of al-Mufīd and al-Tūsī the schema of the major and minor occultations is clearly laid out, situating the careers of the emissaries and the possibility of writing to the Imām firmly in the past.

<sup>518</sup> Here we must again differ with Yoshida's assessment of *Kamāl al-dīn*. Yoshida describes al-Ṣadūq's use of the al-Khiḍr narrative as a means of supporting his view that the imām's occultation is prefigured in the occultations of earlier figures (Yoshida, p. 95). As we see, this is something of a reversal of the work's intentions. The occultations of previous prophets are not a deeply-held belief that al-Ṣadūq has set out to prove, rather the notion of previous occultations and the probative potential of that notion is here harnessed for the primary objective of convincing the reader that the current occultation, that of the Twelfth Imām, is real.

instability and the difficulty of finding reliable evidence into the scintillating image of the occultation with which he persuades his reader. We have already observed in Chapter 1 how al-Ṣadūq makes some use in *Kamāl al-dīn* of his father's theological doctrine that occultation is part of a much more pervasive necessity of secrecy in revelation.<sup>519</sup> We have no evidence of al-Ṣadūq taking this as far as his father by attaching it to the technical problem of the authenticity of *aḥādīth*, but we do see him making extensive use of the idea of secrecy and of its intrinsic value in the mythic world of occultation in which he inhabits the reader.

On a doctrinal level this appears most clearly in the question of whether or not it is permitted to reveal the name of the Hidden Imām. The short answer to this question is that it is absolutely not allowed to do so. The sin which naming the Imām constitutes is mentioned in numerous *akhbār* throughout the work, and al-Ṣadūq at the book's very end gives a chapter where this prohibition is systematically affirmed.<sup>520</sup> By way of some contrast, *Kamāl al-dīn* is all the while replete with materials which do name the Imām,<sup>521</sup> such that long before we reach the chapter in which al-Ṣadūq lays down his verdict on the subject we are in no doubt that the Twelfth Imām's name is Muḥammad and that a great many people have said so, and this because al-Ṣadūq himself has told us. In a construction analogous to al-Ṣadūq's treatment of the *fatra*, here again we see him intervening at his work's close to give a ruling which he has himself repeatedly subverted and violated in the main body of the text. Just as is the case with the *fatra*, this apparent contradiction serves a valuable purpose, allowing al-Ṣadūq to enrich his narratives with unorthodox material that he can later disavow once it has served its mimetic purpose.

In his decidedly unconvincing prohibition of naming the imām, al-Ṣadūq is negotiating and ultimately enhancing a powerful theme of secrecy that pervades *Kamāl al-dīn*, unsurprisingly given the book's subject matter. The need for secrecy and hiddenness are, of course, perennial features of the book's myriad narratives of occultation. The *ḥujja* is hidden from persecution, the king leaves his people to wander the earth alone, the faithful lie low until guidance returns, the one who seeks the truth must remain silent lest the less enlightened masses take offence. Salmān's parents cast him into a well when he resolves to leave idol worship and seek God's

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<sup>519</sup> See above.

<sup>520</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 123, 510, 676-677

<sup>521</sup> E.g. *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 91, 284, 368, 458, 469. In a number of such instances (though by no means all) the name Muḥammad is written with the letters of Muḥammad (b. al-Ḥasan, that is to say the Hidden Imam) separated in their isolated forms, clearly in a gesture of dissimulation. Needless to say, while the gesture is clear it does little to conceal the name from the reader, particularly in the presence of other reports which eschew such caution. Moreover, the device is self-evidently extremely susceptible to the whims of copyists, who might join the letters up or separate them depending on their sensibilities, be they the copyists of al-Ṣadūq's own written sources or those of the manuscripts of *Kamāl al-dīn* over the past millennium. Only an autograph manuscript from al-Ṣadūq's own hand or one endorsed by him could clarify his own position on the matter.

messenger, while Abū Sa‘īd the Indian nearly meets his death at the hands of angry Sunnīs in Kabul when he ill-advisedly tells them that the Prophet he seeks named his successor not as Abū Bakr but ‘Alī.<sup>522</sup>

Yet inextricable from this need for secrecy is the limit of secrecy. *Kamāl al-dīn* is not just about the hiddenness of the imām but about the fact that he is not hidden forever, nor, perhaps, from everyone. When prophets vanish they first foretell their return or the coming of the next prophet. The faithful do not know where the imām is, but they do know he is somewhere, walking among them, seeing them though they do not see him. Hidden though it is, the truth may still appear to the wanderer in the desert, and one day the imām will return. Secrecy is essential, but it is also partial.

More specifically, the power of the written word to reveal secrets and to give access to knowledge in the absence of the knower is never far away in *Kamāl al-dīn*. Alongside some establishing images in the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* section of the book wherein prophets’ followers maintain their religion as a memory during their teacher’s absence, the assembled epistles of the Hidden Imām forge an image of text’s discrete, disclosing power that stretches far beyond them to pervade the pages of *Kamāl al-dīn* itself and thus its authorial address, commanding secrecy even as they reveal the imām’s power to their recipients.<sup>523</sup> Meanwhile, the accounts of those who met the imām in person often conclude with the imām commanding the lucky disciple never to speak of what he has seen.<sup>524</sup> Yet what these Shī‘īs saw is now set down in writing for the reader of *Kamāl al-dīn* to peruse at leisure. This book of al-Ṣadūq’s, too, is for its readers a potent written testament to the unseen, initiating the reader into the company of those know of the imām’s disclosure. Like the imām’s letters it holds the imām’s truth in his absence. Like them it reveals secrets. Like them it utters in text that which, paradoxically, must not be uttered aloud.

Just as he weaves his book into the fabric of its own narratives, so al-Ṣadūq inserts even himself into this collapsing of the present and the mythic. At the beginning of the work, we are told that he was commanded to write it by the Imām himself in a dream. The inspiring dream is not, of course, an unfamiliar start to a Medieval Islamic book, but the deeper significance here could not be more obvious. The account inserts al-Ṣadūq himself into the company of those whose stories he tells, guided by a nightly vision of the imām just as they

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<sup>522</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 466-467, 522-523.

<sup>523</sup> E.g. *ibid.*, pp. 509-512 (hh. 1, 3, 4).

<sup>524</sup> E.g. *ibid.*, pp. 473.

were.<sup>525</sup> More striking is a passage later in the work, near the end of the chapter on those who received letters from the Hidden Imām. Al-Ṣadūq tells us that one such message was received by his own father, who had written to the imām asking that he might be blessed with a son. The imām's answer came that he would. That son was, of course, al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq.<sup>526</sup> This fascinating little anecdote represents a kind of authorial self-representation that is highly unusual for a *ḥadīth* compiler. Rather than being only the impartial, discerning conduit through whom others' words are transmitted to the reader, al-Ṣadūq here confesses himself as the interested subject of those words. The device works alongside the opening dream sequence to integrate al-Ṣadūq's own authorial address into the fabric of the narrative that he creates.<sup>527</sup> Not only is *Kamāl al-dīn* another secret document for the privileged few, both its composition and the birth of its composer are direct consequences of the will of the imām, the book thus manifesting in its very existence the Hidden Imām's continuing power to influence the world and guide his community from behind the veil. Book, author and reader are all subsumed into the drama of occultation, a drama that through this process becomes ever harder to deny as reality.

### PROOF 3 – The Plausible and The Implausible

Al-Ṣadūq's strategy for addressing the common problem of the weakness of the occultation texts is as unusual as it is fascinating. It is unusual on account of the wonderful matrix of story and signification that al-Ṣadūq constructs while other authors draw on theology and *ḥadīth* criticism, but it is also unusual because al-Ṣadūq, unlike other authors, chooses not only to retain those same weak occultation texts as part of his strategy but also keeps up a vocal insistence of their probative value. He begins *Kamāl al-dīn* by declaring in no uncertain terms the *tawātur* of the proof-texts of occultation, and at no point, even as he constructs his separate endeavour of proof by myth, narrating conflicting accounts of the imām's age and appearance and fantastic tales of citadels in the desert, does he declare this claim to *tawātur* to be rescinded. How much of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s wealth of material is governed by these claims of

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<sup>525</sup> While it is true that in the encounter narratives this vision, of course, precedes an actual encounter with the imām, *Kamāl al-dīn*'s stories are not short of believers receiving messages in the forms of dreams and visions. See *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 559

<sup>526</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 529.

<sup>527</sup> It is interesting that while it is commonly recognised that al-Ṣadūq is said to have been born in this way as a result of the Hidden Imām's prayer (e.g. Fyzee (1982), it is seldom recognised that al-Ṣadūq himself claims this to have been the case, with scholars identifying it instead as a later tradition. That we can trace the story back to al-Ṣadūq himself perhaps adds credence that such an exchange occurred, but more importantly it shows how in its original context this oft-repeated legend about al-Ṣadūq plays an important role in the construction of his own authorial address.

textual certainty? There are certainly points in al-Ṣadūq's material where *tawātur* is actively asserted, such as amassed *naṣṣ* texts, lists of witnesses and multiple *asānīd*, but this is left for the reader to deduce. If al-Ṣadūq demarcates a core of indisputable material around which he arranges texts which, though useful for other reasons, are not so reliable, he does not say so.<sup>528</sup>

For all its potency, readers of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s beguiling narratives retain the capacity to ask how much of this is true. Indeed, the text often encourages them to do so. Even while al-Ṣadūq supports a problematic group of texts with even more problematic texts on the one hand and Quixotic claims of their *tawātur* on the other, he also maintains through *Kamāl al-dīn* a strong interrogative voice, a voice which bids the reader remain mindful of what is and is not plausible. Sporadically through the first two thirds of the book al-Ṣadūq frames a particular report with the complaint that detractors of the Imāmīya believe such stories as this (al-Khiḍr and the fountain of youth, for example)<sup>529</sup> but scorn to accept the true miracle of the occultation. Why is one miracle more unbelievable than another? These complaints hold a double significance for our analysis of al-Ṣadūq's methods here. Not only do we see him take the highly unusual step of bidding his reader ponder this question of the plausibility of narrated events, but it also reveals to us that this is a question of which al-Ṣadūq himself is aware. His prompts to the reader tells us that that al-Ṣadūq is thinking not just about the reliability or otherwise of his narrations' provenance, but also their comparative capacity to be believed.

It is in the last third of *Kamāl al-dīn*, after the *qīṣaṣ* texts, the *naṣṣ* texts and the occultation texts, that this line of discourse takes centre stage. Concluding his long run of testimonies to the Twelfth Imām's existence, al-Ṣadūq begins an extensive treatment of the problem of the Hidden Imām's unusual longevity, and specifically to whether or not the assertion that he really will live on in hiding until the end of the world, however remote, is to be believed. This is a noticeably peculiar step. The question has already been addressed, along with other contested aspects of the Imām's nature, in earlier chapters, especially the *qīṣaṣ* material. We have already seen Noah live for nine hundred years! Why does al-Ṣadūq now return, after laying out his assembled proof-texts, to so unexceptional a question? Though the problem is comparatively new (we have no composition date for *Kamāl al-dīn*, but it must be at least a century after the imām's disappearance), it does not feature prominently among the extended polemics of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s introduction, and does not seem to have been an exceptionally contentious issue amongst those pertaining to occultation.

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<sup>528</sup> We shall see how he ultimately does erect such a demarcation, but does so with regard to another group of texts, doing little to solve the ambiguities surrounding those discussed thus far. See below.

<sup>529</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 422-423.



More conspicuous still is the fact that al-Ṣadūq introduces with this question a new corpus of texts. These are ostensibly compiled as examples of stories of miraculous long life more outlandish than that of the Twelfth Imām, but for the first time they are not drawn from the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus. We are no longer contemplating the history of revelation with stories of previous prophets, nor the more recent careers of the imāms, rather al-Ṣadūq's exemplars of extreme old age are for the most part culled from Arab lore – stories purporting to date back to before Muḥammad of which a considerable volume were preserved under the Umayyads and then the Abbasids, mostly in histories, genealogical literature and in *adab* compendia.<sup>530</sup>

It is not hard to see the utility of these texts' content for al-Ṣadūq's goals. Here is an abundant source of precedents for the imām's longevity, which, guided by the 'Whatsoever befell' paradigm could amount to a valuable proof. But the change in genre remains significant. Al-Ṣadūq is taking his reader still further away from the corpora of proofs with which legal theological literature is usually comfortable and upon which it was accustomed to rely. Unlike the *qīṣaṣ* material, which are all narrated from the imāms with full *asānīd*, these stories of the *mu'ammārūn* are mostly presented with no chain of transmission. Al-Ṣadūq is once again to be found crossing Khalidī's dichotomy between the curious, open-minded *adīb* and the authenticating, canonising *ḥadīth* scholar discussed in Chapter II.<sup>531</sup> In this instance, however, he crosses in the opposite direction. While *ʿIlal* and *al-Khiṣāl* combined a *ḥadīth* compendium's limited sources with an *adab* compendium's eclecticism of form and subject matter, here al-Ṣadūq is confronting serious polemics of doctrine, polemics at the heart of which exist disputes over the authenticity of materials, and drawing on texts that are traditionally the prerogative of *adab* and its comparative disinterest in source verification. The effect of this new corpus is thus a profound changing of the character of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s discourse, further blurring the already uncertain lines between those texts that are *mutawātīr* and those which are not.

In a further indication of the different status of these new texts, al-Ṣadūq does not present the *mu'ammārūn* texts as validating precedents for the Hidden Imām's longevity, despite their obvious utility as such. Instead he introduces them with the complaint that the opponents of the Imāmīya believe these accounts and those like them, but then have the gall to reject belief in the Hidden Imām as implausible. This, al-Ṣadūq laments, can only be hypocrisy.<sup>532</sup> These stories of the *mu'ammārūn* are not proof-texts but anti-proof-texts, examples of what other

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<sup>530</sup> The most significant example of this literature for our purposes is the *Kitāb al-mu'ammārīn* of Sahl b. Muḥammad al-Sijistānī (d. 255/869).

<sup>531</sup> See above.

<sup>532</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 578, 581.

groups adduce to which the proof-texts presented in *Kamāl al-dīn*'s earlier chapters are to be compared and confirmed as superior (or at least less absurd).

Al-Ṣadūq is keen to identify these narrations as enemy property. Most, as noted, are supplied without *asānīd*, one text purporting to have been found written on a rock near Alexandria and another even being quoted from a damaged text such that the story breaks off mid-narrative,<sup>533</sup> and this no doubt casts the preceding images of *tawātur* in a favourable light. In several instances, however, the *mu'ammārūn* texts' sources are discussed, at which point it is stressed that they are narrated by non-Imāmīs from non-Imāmī sources.<sup>534</sup> Discussing 'The Old Man of the Maghrib' Abū Dunyā, al-Ṣadūq notes that 'It is not even now confirmed among them that he has died.'<sup>535</sup> The focus is entirely on these opponents' beliefs regarding Abū Dunyā, with no indication given of what view al-Ṣadūq or his fellows might take on this. When telling the story of king Shaddād, who lived for nine hundred years and built the city of Iram, al-Ṣadūq goes to some length to altericise the story, telling how no less a non-Shī'ī than Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān learns of the place, summons the man who claims to have seen it and asks Ka'b al-Aḥbār<sup>536</sup> to corroborate his account.<sup>537</sup> This categorising of material is at its most specific when al-Ṣadūq asks how people can believe stories of warring serpents and hubristic kings from mere scholars, but not confirmation of the occultation spoken by Muḥammad or his imāms.<sup>538</sup> We are left in no doubt that reports narrated from God's representatives carries more weight than those from the companion Abū Wā'il and his ilk.

Al-Ṣadūq also expressly distances the content of these texts from his other corpora. The accounts of the *mu'ammārūn* are a colourful and eclectic assemblage even by *Kamāl al-dīn*'s high standards, and much is made in *Kamāl al-dīn* of the scale of their miraculous elements. 'They believe,' al-Ṣadūq objects regarding one such narrative, 'that that gazelle's dung endured in excess of five hundred years, unchanged by either rain or wind, or by the passing of days, night and years by it, yet they do not believe that the Qā'im from Muḥammad's house will endure until he rides out with the sword!'<sup>539</sup> Regarding the magical city of Irum he strays into hyperbole, decrying his detractors' telling 'of a place like unto Paradise itself,'<sup>540</sup> hidden

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<sup>533</sup> Ibid., pp. 575, 581.

<sup>534</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 601.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid., p. 564.

<sup>536</sup> Ka'b is one of the figures whom al-Ṣadūq singles out as narrators of the improbable whom the opponents of the Imāmīya inexplicably believe whilst rejecting the Hidden Imām. *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 557.

<sup>537</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 578-581.

<sup>538</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 556-559, 601.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid., pp. 558-559.

<sup>540</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 578. Tellingly, al-Ṣadūq inserts no such objection earlier on in *Kamāl al-dīn* when Alexander at the end of his wanderings comes across a land where live descendants of Mūsā's people in a perfect society, with whom Alexander elects to dwell for the rest of his days. *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 433-435.

somewhere on earth, a comparison which the reports he cites do not themselves make, though Iram's splendour is certainly emphasised. Al-Ṣadūq's rhetoric clearly functions to further other these stories, to heighten the reader's appreciation of their bizarre colour in a way he never does with his accounts of the Hidden Imām.

Despite these emphatically drawn lines between proofs and anti-proofs, it is unclear from the outset to what extent Ṣadūq wishes his reader to invest in these lesser reports as fact. Whatever al-Ṣadūq's objections, we do not have to look hard to see elements in these curious stories which have more to offer *Kamāl al-dīn*'s objectives than their ostensive function as exemplars of what others believe. Many times al-Ṣadūq will point to illustrative truths in accounts even as he derides them as implausible, and many more times the core messages of his text will appear unannounced in material that he labels as incidental. The story of Iram, for example, a jewel-encrusted city in the middle of the desert which the narrator stumbles upon whilst searching for his lost camel, bears uncanny similarity to the Hidden Imām's citadel in the oasis that was stumbled upon by the Shaykh of the Banū Rāshid. The story tells how, having become stranded from his caravan on the way to Mecca, he put his trust in God and wandered on foot, eventually finding himself in a green oasis, in the midst of which was a glittering citadel rising like a sword from the grass. Entering it he was told by attending servants that God intended a blessing for him, and was led behind a veil to where there sat a young man above whose head was suspended a sword. The man announced himself as the Qā'im of the house of Muḥammad, who would rise up with this sword at the end of time to fill the world with justice. The lost pilgrim from Hamadān falls on his face in reverence, but the Imām kindly raises him up sends him on his way home with a purse full of gold.<sup>541</sup>

In another *mu'ammārūn* story, Khumarawayh<sup>542</sup> b. Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn seeks to plunder the treasure of the pyramids, whereupon he encounters an inscription in Greek that none can read. He is advised by a wise man from among the people that the only man with the knowledge to decode the text is a three hundred-year-old bishop who lives in Ethiopia. The bishop is too old to make the journey north, and so the king resorts to an exchange of letters. Eventually the Bishop reveals that the inscription instructs that none will be able to open the treasury until the qā'im from the house of Muḥammad comes to claim it.<sup>543</sup> Besides the instructive climax of the story, the necessity to seek knowledge from an absent, age-old authority, as well as the epistolary means of doing so, has clear resonances with the world of al-Ṣadūq's other material. al-Ṣadūq purports to show the reader fantasies such that the Hidden Imām looks real by

<sup>541</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 480-481.

<sup>542</sup> The printed text of *Kamāl al-dīn* renders the name Ḥammādayh, however Khuramawayh b. Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, ruler of Egypt, is clearly meant.

<sup>543</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 588-590.

contrast, but he simultaneously empowers the Hidden Imām with fantasy, projecting his story into these wildest flights of humanity’s imagination to show the reader the perennial truth of Imāmī doctrine.

It is apparent that there is far more than mere parody at work here. Although al-Ṣadūq expressly distances his arguments from having any stake in the truth of these reports and, indeed, makes polemic capital from the intimation that they might not be true, this long procession of stories of the long-lived steadily expands the reader’s stock of images wherein they are by now thoroughly drilled to see the reality of *ghayba*. For all the improbable details, the talking wolves and the exploding dung,<sup>544</sup> there is an element of sheer *tawātur* here. At the close of the last *mu‘ammarūn* story al-Ṣadūq has equipped his readers with a prodigious set of examples of what others believe regarding human capacity to endure time’s vicissitudes, but by the time the names of almost fifty such resilient men and women (alongside one or two vultures) have passed before them, only the most relentlessly cynical readers can have resisted the idea of such longevity becoming a little more plausible, regardless of who believes in it. The power of al-Ṣadūq’s mythic leitmotifs to embed the occultation in the fabric of reality and imagination is coupled here with *tawātur*’s power of sheer indisputable volume.

#### APOCALYPSE – *Bilawhar and Yūdhāsaf*

After the *mu‘ammarūn* texts al-Ṣadūq moves to the last and most improbable of *Kamāl al-dīn*’s diverse proof-corpora. This is an extremely lengthy, semi-synthesised account of the exploits of an Indian prince named Yūdhāsaf, better recognised as the Buddha.<sup>545</sup> Not only is the subject matter, of course, highly unusual in the works of an Imāmī *faqīh*, but this text in fact includes a number narratives unknown in Buddhist sources. As such it has attracted some attention, but this has not thus far translated into much interrogation of the text’s role in *Kamāl al-dīn*.<sup>546</sup> The text is substantial, comprising 10% of the book as a whole, and is conspicuously

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<sup>544</sup> Ibid., pp. 561, 568-569.

<sup>545</sup> Unlike the son of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, the Buddha, from whose title the word Yūdhāsaf ultimately derives, is a long way from any historical memory that al-Ṣadūq might be party to. Yūdhāsaf becomes Josephat in European context, a figure of legend with similarly little connection to any self-consciously Buddhist context. Although other Arabic versions of the story are nearer the mark in their location of dots with *Būdāsf* (as followed by Gimaret), and though we have no way of knowing whether the shift from b to y comes from al-Ṣadūq or a later scribe, to ‘correct’ the text would be to impose a quite fictitious notion that al-Ṣadūq or the scribe was somehow mistaken in giving the name Yūdhāsaf to the protagonist of this text’s wondrous adventures, when in fact Yūdhāsaf is perfectly named to perform the task intended for him. It seems judicious, then, to leave him as he is.

<sup>546</sup> Gimaret undertook to produce a translation and edition of *Kitāb Bilawhar wa Būdāsf*, based on an manuscript of *Kamāl al-dīn* and other Arabic exemplars of the story. Stern & Walzer give a translation and analysis of those stories in the text that are unknown in any Buddhist source. Matar examines an

placed as last substantial component of the book before the closing miscellanies. Far from being an eclectic afterthought, the interest of which was not appreciated by its compiler, this concluding flourish into the unknown plays a pivotal role in al-Ṣadūq's compilation.

At the end of a short *isnād* of mostly unknown sources<sup>547</sup> the text begins thus:

I have heard that there was once a king amongst the kings of India. His soldiers were many, his kingdom was large, he was held in dread by his people and was victorious over his enemies. But he was also possessed of great desire for the passions of this world, its delights and its diversions, and so was ruled and swayed by his passions. For him the most beloved and trusted of men was he who flattered him and lauded his opinions, while the most despised and doubted was he who neglected his commands and bade him do otherwise than he wished.<sup>548</sup>

It is immediately apparent that we have travelled a great distance. We are no longer looking at Arabs to whom are attributed familiar poems and to whom tribes and acquaintances trace their genealogies, who for all their outlandishness are named and categorised in known sources. This opening places us squarely in the land of Once upon a time and Far, far away, where knowable, named figures are replaced by known types. This is not Nimrod or Pharaoh or even Hārūn al-Rashīd, but nor is it just a tyrant: it is all of them; it is the Tyrant.<sup>549</sup>

The story as it proceeds from here is long and very complex, for it is in fact several stories within one another. This impious king is confronted by a lone sage who seeks to change his ways, and who tells him the story of Yūdhāsaf with that aim. This story in turn is that of the youthful Yūdhāsaf, a sheltered prince and the son of another, more graphically impious king, a king who has banished all men of religion from his kingdom on pain of death. So many were burned to death in this pogrom that the land of India remained ablaze for an entire year. Prince Yūdhāsaf, meanwhile, undergoes the proverbial realisation of change and mortality familiar from Buddhist literature, stealing out of the palace into the real world, where he sees before him the shocking realities of decay and death from which he had been protected. Cast into doubt, he seeks the means of answering his mortal dilemma, and learns of the men of religion who once roamed the land but whom the king has driven into hiding, whom he dearly wishes now to find and to consult. The wise man of God Bilawhar, who dwells in another country, hears of the prince's plight, and travels in disguise to find him and to teach him. They meet in

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instance of continued interest in the text in later Shī'ī readers. For an analysis of the potential sources of the text in *Kamāl al-dīn* see de Blois.

<sup>547</sup> Some manuscripts omit the *isnād*. See *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 603.

<sup>548</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 603.

<sup>549</sup> See Bray, 'Abbasid Myth'.

secret and begin Yūdhāsaf's education, an education which consists largely of Bilawhar telling the prince improving stories, some of which contain characters who tell stories in turn. For seventy pages we are transported into a maelstrom of parables and aphorisms, narratives and metanarratives, a world where men of God are forever struggling to spread the faith in the face of despotic, idolatrous rulers, whose depravations often compel them to do their work in secret. Like the *qiṣaṣ* material at the start of the book, these narratives are filled with Imāmī vocabulary with terms like '*imām*,' '*khurūj*' and, of course, '*ghayba*.'

We noted in Chapter II that it is with regard to this story that al-Ṣadūq voices for the only time a concern that occupies much of his work: that these stories are included in *Kamāl al-dīn* as a lure to the curious reader, attracting them with tales of magic and derring-do in the hope that they will be compelled to read the rest of the book and so be educated in the truth of the Hidden Imām. While there is surely some truth to this, and the Yūdhāsaf stories are as alluring a bait as could be wished for, there is reason to suspect that this is not the sum of al-Ṣadūq's motives. Al-Ṣadūq discusses the question at some length at the Yūdhāsaf stories' close, referring first to 'This *ḥadīth* and those of the *akhbār* of the *mu'ammārūn* that resemble it,'<sup>550</sup> and later simply to 'This *ḥadīth* and what else in this book resembles it.'<sup>551</sup> The description raises the point of axial ambiguity discussed above: where does the line fall between what resembles these stories and what does not? The continuum of refractions and echoes running the length of *Kamāl al-dīn* is not so easily broken down into similarity and dissimilarity. As we see Bilawhar's covert instruction of Yūdhāsaf we cannot now but see too the figures both of the Hidden Imām and his disciples and of al-Ṣadūq himself educating his readers in this time of persecution.

While al-Ṣadūq makes plain the easy contention that the *aḥādīth* of the imāms are a more reliable source than the Yūdhāsaf stories, the latter corpus thus remains inextricably integrated in *Kamāl al-dīn*'s web of images, and rather than viewing it simply as an appended lure we must consider how those images are finally developed in this the book's long conclusion. It need barely be said that we see in Yūdhāsaf's distant world a further development of the universalising of the occultation myth observed in the *mu'ammārūn* section. In the Yūdhāsaf stories, however, this strategy is taken to a far more dramatic and transformative level. The difference is first one of scale: in the utterly distant, wondrous and non-Abrahamic context of India,<sup>552</sup> al-Ṣadūq is free to draw his motifs larger than life. The wicked tyrants here are not

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<sup>550</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 667.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 668.

<sup>552</sup> India has a history of playing the role of the exotic other in Abbasid literature. This receives abundant illustration in the '*Ajā'ib al-hind*' of Buzurg b. Shahriyār (d. 342/954), whose exotic tales must represent a much more widespread popular literature along similar lines now lost to us. This text, meanwhile, is illustratively compared to al-Bīrūnī's introduction to his *Tahqīq mā fī al-hind*, wherein he vents not a

just Abbasids but raw idolaters, not merely rejecting the messages of lone prophets but condemning entire religions to be burned to death. The persecuted sages do not teach obscure theology but essential truths of God's oneness and power and of man's frailty. All this meanwhile sits alongside a healthy quota of tales about daring princes and fair maidens in towers. Again al-Ṣadūq is ending his work with an apocalypse,<sup>553</sup> turning the Yūdhāsaf stories from a flight of fancy to a description of things as they truly are. The stark, archetypal quality that al-Ṣadūq's motifs take on here constitute a powerful statement of equivalence. The Abbasids are the idolatrous, genocidal tyrants. The imām is the sage teaching humanity everything they need to know.<sup>554</sup>

Even as some elements of the narrative are expanded to become absolutes, there are other areas of this apocalypse in which the opposite is true, where elements of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s leitmotifs are made smaller. After all, while al-Ṣadūq and his fellows equivocate endlessly on the exact reason for God's concealment of the imām and how that works for his community, here in the Yūdhāsaf stories things are simpler. The men of God hide for fear of persecution, not as a result of some inscrutable divine act. They are not miraculously concealed, only hidden in another country, and if needs must they can return. Yūdhāsaf himself, who starts the story as the seeker of knowledge, at the end becomes wise himself, such that he, too, is called upon to go forth and teach the people, another awaited *qā'im* who has been in a state of hiddenness.<sup>555</sup> So it is that the *mysterium tremendum* of the occultation is, at the last, lessened here, the Imām's hiddenness incorporated into the older, indeed the Qur'anic and indelibly Shī'ī paradigm of the enlightened few fleeing the tyrannical, misguided majority. The soteriological rupture of the imām's hiddenness becomes mollified into no less familiar a motif than the young man setting out to seek his fortune.

Even as this last of al-Ṣadūq's book takes us to the climax of his universalising myth of revelation and hiddenness, it also completes a powerful epistemological contention regarding the texts of which it is made up. Much of *Kamāl al-dīn* has been a text devoted to asserting equivalence: the events of the occultation are equivalent to the exploits of previous prophets; the textual proofs of the occultation are just as incontrovertible as those proving the fundamentals of Islam, as well as the equivalences that bind together the innumerable permutations of the book's ruling motifs. These equivalences have been asserted repeatedly and directly by al-Ṣadūq himself. As we move into the *mu'ammārūn* texts and then into the

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little frustration at people's credulity with regard to this subject matter. See al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, pp. 1-6.

<sup>553</sup> See above.

<sup>554</sup> It is worth recalling the explicit denial in *al-Tawhīd* of humanity's ability to deduce even such essential truths as these without a *hujja*. See above.

<sup>555</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 663-667.

Yūdhāsaf stories, however, the dynamic changes, and the reader is confronted by a deep ambiguity as to what all these texts are for. Are they entertainment for the easily led, examples of others' folly or proofs of real events?

Even as al-Ṣadūq creates this uncertainty regarding his texts' probative status, he constructs a corresponding certainty that unites them: the perennial presence of the Hidden Imām's image, sustained and even enlarged across *Kamāl al-dīn*'s most unusual materials through its constantly repeated and refracted motifs. We have seen how the perceived weakness of the proof-texts of the Hidden Imām's occultation was a serious concern for the Imāmīya, a concern to which al-Ṣadūq's devices of myth and motif offer a solution. We now see how further addresses the problem by presenting the reality of the Hidden Imām as one that transcends the provenance or authenticity of a given group of texts. Earlier on in *Kamāl al-dīn* the reader meets repeated motifs of hidden authority and patient expectation combined with the assurance that the texts in which they are found are of sound, established provenance, the same *aḥādīth* from which the law is derived. By dropping this assurance in the book's later chapters, maintaining the same motifs in texts the probative force of which he leaves unclear, al-Ṣadūq shows the reader that these questions of authenticity are ultimately unnecessary. The truth of the Hidden Imām transcends such concerns, revealing itself in fairy tales and adventure stories just as it is revealed in the imāms' *ḥadīth*. Al-Ṣadūq never drops his contention that the occultation is proven by *tawātūr*, but he meanwhile pushes the bounds of authenticity. The apocalypse enacted in the Yūdhāsaf stories becomes an apocalypse of genre, liberating occultation as real, cosmic fact from the confines of any particular textual corpus, and in particular from the demand for certainty of provenance which increasingly dominated the *aḥādīth* of the Prophet and the Imāms.

## CONCLUSION – *Wisdom*

Yūdhāsaf addresses his teacher as *al-ḥakīm*, 'the wise man,' and the narrating voice, too, refers to him and similar figures in the metastories as such. Much of his teachings consist of maxims, (*ḥikam*) along such generic lines as 'the worst of deeds is disobeying God,' 'Foolishness is to be content with the world and to neglect what is permanent and lasting,'<sup>556</sup> and so on, the very stuff of the rich tradition of wisdom literature that we encountered in Chapter II. The story

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<sup>556</sup> See especially *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 641-645.



ends with Yūdhāsaf himself attaining wisdom, such that he himself may go forth as ‘An imām for the people who may call them to paradise.’<sup>557</sup>

Wisdom (*ḥikma*) has a tenacious and multifarious presence in *Kamāl al-dīn*. The Yūdhāsaf stories give us a cycle of narratives where wisdom and its attainment are made the central theme, but in the *mu‘ammarūn* texts, too, it is a dominant element. Besides the longevity of their protagonists, these accounts unmistakably exhibit a second shared trait: the valuable words of wisdom which these elderly, Luqmān-like Arab sages are again and again depicted uttering. This is no accident; the figure of the *mu‘ammar* is most commonly found in wisdom literature, his immense age only half of a topos in which the elderly sage shares with his juniors some of the insights he has gained from his long sojourn on earth. The full title of al-Sijistānī’s *al-Mu‘ammarūn* is sometimes given as *Kitāb al-Mu‘ammarīn wa’l-waṣāyā*; ‘The Book of the Long-Lived and of Testaments,’ referring to the usual device in which the old sage counsels his descendants. The wisdom component is thus firmly embedded in the *mu‘ammarūn* material, and certainly not engineered by al-Ṣadūq (al-Ṣadūq shares a great deal of material with al-Sijistānī and is very probably using him as a source. He refers to a *Kitāb al-mu‘ammarīn* in which he finds much of his material, but does not name al-Sijistānī<sup>558</sup>). However, it is equally the case that al-Ṣadūq has chosen not to abbreviate these texts, an easy task given that in both *Kamāl al-dīn* and al-Sijistānī’s work each entry begins by stating the advanced age of the subject before detailing his wise or poetic utterances. Instead he keeps the bulk of the texts, which beyond the age of their protagonists in the main add little to *Kamāl al-dīn*’s stock of motifs, but they do help transform the last third of the book into a treasure trove of wisdom literature.

The presence of wisdom in the earlier parts of *Kamāl al-dīn* is of a different sort. As noted above, exhorting believers to trust in God’s (often inscrutable) wisdom, the same wisdom that prompts him to hide their imām away, is al-Ṣadūq’s preferred response to the question of why the occultation has occurred. In his short chapter on the reason (‘*illa*) for the occultation, al-Ṣadūq gives ten reports which variously give the reason that the imām should be hidden so that he would not be compelled to give allegiance to any other, and the reason that he is hidden out of fear of being killed,<sup>559</sup> before concluding with by far the longest report in which Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq answers the disciple ibn al-Faḍl’s question on the cause for the occultation as follows:

The meaning of the wisdom (*ḥikma*) behind his occultation is the meaning of the wisdom behind the occultations of those of God’s *ḥujaj* who have gone before him,

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<sup>557</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 663-667.

<sup>558</sup> It is also possible that the books share a common source or that al-Ṣadūq is getting al-Sijistānī’s material second-hand.

<sup>559</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 507-509.

and the meaning of the wisdom therein will not be revealed until his reappearance, just as the meaning of the wisdom of what al-Khiḍr did when he scuppered the boat, killed the boy and rebuilt the wall was not revealed to Mūsā until the time of their parting. O ibn al-Faḍl, this matter is from among God's matters, a secret from among God's secrets, an unseen from among the unseen things of God. When we know that God, blessed and exalted, is wise, we believe that all of his actions are wisdom, even if their meaning is not revealed.<sup>560</sup>

*Kamāl al-dīn* is a book about God's wisdom. Al-Ṣadūq airs a sentiment common to several Imāmī authors of the century when he bemoans at the book's beginning the dismay and confusion (*ḥayra*) that afflicts the Imāmīya with regard to the question of the Hidden Imām.<sup>561</sup> He thus introduces *Kamāl al-dīn* as a consolation, an attempt to reassure the community that, as he says in the passage just cited, God is wise, and thus all God's actions will be wise. The myth of the Twelfth Imām that this book constructs across its many pages is an illustration of that wisdom, a gathering of images all depicting ways in which this epistemological nightmare can, after all, make sense.

It is therefore both striking but strangely predictable that as *Kamāl al-dīn*'s address builds towards its climax and boundaries between past and present, self and other, even Shī'ī and imām are allusively broken down, we find an increasing proliferation of wisdom literature, literature articulating wisdom which, if not essentially human, is certainly articulated by humans in ways in which other humans can understand (unlike the wisdom that is a secret from among God's secrets). Al-Ṣadūq is clear from the outset to assert that God's wisdom is inscrutable, but he then embarks on a book-long process of showing the reader how that wisdom can, through narrative, become comprehensible or at least familiar. It is therefore entirely germane to this process that he begins, quite unannounced, to introduce less inscrutable forms of wisdom (still referred to as *ḥikma*, of course), gently eroding the boundaries between the knowable and the unknowable. God's wisdom in hiding the imām, al-Ṣadūq intimates, is no less self-evident than the wisdom of Bīlawhar's maxims or Luqmān's testament.

A chief active agent in this equation is the figure of al-Khiḍr.<sup>562</sup> Evoked above in his locus classicus in al-Kahf, al-Khiḍr appears precisely as a curious blurring between human and divine wisdom, and also of the creative tension between theological principle and instructive narrative, 'One among our servants to whom we granted some mercy, and taught some of our

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<sup>560</sup> *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 509.

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>562</sup> Yoshida has already astutely observed al-Khiḍr's role in *Kamāl al-dīn*, as well as supplying a valuable comparison with his role in the writings of al-Mufīd and al-Ṭūsī on the occultation.

knowledge,<sup>563</sup> whose inerrant knowledge of things to come frustrates and baffles the prophet Mūsā. His appearances in *Kamāl al-dīn*, meanwhile, occupy a correspondingly broad, transitional frame, covering the full range of the book's permuting motifs. He starts life as a seeker, adventuring in the service of the *ḥujja* Alexander, an adventure which leads to his drinking from the Water of Life, whereupon he takes on not only *qā'im*-like longevity but also the characteristic of being hidden from the eyes of men. He comes to give authoritative counsel to Muḥammad al-Bāqir, but elsewhere appears, Shī'ī-like, lamenting the passing of the Prophet, of 'Alī and of al-Ḥusayn. He attends the Ḥajj unseen like the Twelfth Imām, whose companion he is in their shared longevity. In his wanderings, transformations and sporadic presences this elusive, mythic figure thus embodies the possibilities that *Kamāl al-dīn* offers believer, foremost among them the possibility that the wisdom God's divine plan will eventually yield up a final, cathartic explanation.<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Q 17:

<sup>564</sup> See *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 417-423, 561-562. A magisterial survey of al-Khiḍr's appearances and figurings in Islamic literature is supplied by Franke in his *Begegnung mit Khidr*. As mentioned above, Franke in fact notes *Kamāl al-dīn* as the first known instance of al-Khiḍr's being put to use in Shī'ī literatures.

## CONCLUSION - Traditionism

### AL-ŞADŪQ AND IMĀMĪ THOUGHT IN THE EARLY BUWAYHID PERIOD

We see in al-Şadūq and in the formative moment of Imāmī *ḥadīth* that he shows us an uncommonly self-aware creation of a corpus. By the time what would become the Sunnī legal-theological tradition began debating the importance and sanctity of the Prophet's *aḥādīth*, the fact that the Prophet was dead and gone was the long-standing status quo. In al-Şadūq's case, conversely, as he works to assert the value of the imāms' recorded speech the fundamental validity of such an endeavour is still an open question in Imāmī circles. How can recollections and written words hope to replace the living imām? How can representation hope to equate to presence? It is the urgent purpose of al-Şadūq and his fellows to assert that they can, that God's obligation to provide the faithful with his *ḥujja* has not been compromised.

Al-Şadūq shows us in these concerns the concerns of the Imāmī traditionists at the close of the fourth/tenth century, the beginning of the Buwayhid period and the ending of the time when the presence of God's imām remained in the living memory of the community. It is this last circumstance in particular that shapes al-Şadūq's priorities, in his project to make a scripture of the imāms' recorded words a viable alternative to their presence, one that was defensible both in the face of non-Shī'īs who had their own ideas about what constituted a viable scripture, and in the face of non-Imāmī Shī'īs who continued to insist on a more imminently present authority.

This purpose suffuses al-Şadūq's work. Nowhere amongst al-Şadūq's extant works does one find a book which does not exert conspicuous efforts to assert the value of these *aḥādīth* and to defend them against criticism. This is not just reverence for the imāms, it is reverence for the textual corpus of their reported words, which in the era of occultation should be accorded the utmost sanctity, the sanctity of the imām to whose guidance these texts constitute believers' only conduit. Inseparable from this summons to reverence, meanwhile, is the infinite variety of al-Şadūq's ingenuity in putting it into practice. In *al-Tawḥīd* we observed how al-Şadūq uses the fragmentary nature of his collected sources to obfuscate, massing the non-specific, occasionally contradictory polyphony of compiled *aḥādīth* as a riposte to and a refusal of systematic theology's intrusive subdivisions of divine mysteries. In *Kamāl al-dīn* he creates a vast sequence of juxtaposed, overlapping texts and images to create a vision of the Hidden Imām that is enriched and empowered by the very textual instabilities and ambiguities that troubled other Imāmīs writing about occultation. In *Ilal* and *al-Khiṣāl*,

tapping into uses of compiled form that are familiar from *adab* literature, he suffuses the *adab* compendium's well-honed capacity to educate, entertain and outwit with a powerful dose of both of Imāmī legitimist claims and of the dissimulation that is so embedded in classical Imāmī experiences of political power.

## THE DISHONEST COMPILER

What broader conclusions may we draw from al-Ṣadūq's writings regarding the study of compilation more generally? A first question, one we asked in the introduction to this thesis, concerns the extent of sophistication of this medium, more specifically to what extent we may expect one part of a compilation to deliberately influence how other parts are read. In Section II, especially, we have sought to assert a maximalist answer to this question. In both of the works studied we pointed to structures of meaning that stretched the full length of the book. In both we have hypothesised a cumulative generation of meaning, whereby the compiler expects a broadly linear reading of his work in the order that he has presented it.<sup>565</sup> In *al-Tawḥīd*'s tripartite structure we have seen how the cosmological surprises of the middle section need to be cushioned by the apologies of the first section, whilst also being a necessary precursor to the assault on theology conducted in the third section. *Kamāl al-dīn* similarly works step by step – the echoes of the Twelfth Imām of Yūdhāsaf are no use if the reader has not first read those stories as presented earlier in the book, and they are much more effective if the extension of those images from *aḥādīth* into more apocryphal material has already been actualised by the reading of the *mu'ammārūn* texts. In both cases the sequence is many-layered. It is not enough for C to follow A, rather B must come in the middle, a process that requires the compiler to trust the reader to bear with his prescribed sequence over hundreds of pages and *aḥādīth*.

It is hoped that our hermeneutic wager may be seen to have paid off, and that the structures pointed to in al-Ṣadūq's work will find parallels in other compendia when they are subjected to a similar sustained analysis. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the wager remains just that, and the conclusions arrived at in this regard remain speculative, hypotheses in the absence of authorial self-disclosure.

This necessary analytical humility, however, allows us in turn to make certain observations about the nature of compilation as an act of authorship. As we point to the structures of

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<sup>565</sup> This echoes Burge's conclusions regarding al-Bukhārī's *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*. See Burge, 'Reading Between the Lines', pp. 187, 190; 'Jalāl al-Dīn', pp. 295-296

meaning at work in these texts we point in effect to a certain readiness in the fourth/tenth-century reader to look for them. Books such as al-Ṣadūq's were read largely by the same literate classes who wrote them, and what we see of compilers' expectations of their readers may quite confidently be regarded as informed expectations. At the same time, the fact remains that the opacity of this medium that we as modern scholars confront is a very real one, and we may also be confident that the compilers were aware of this. Atomizing readings of *ḥadīth* compendia are not a modern invention, rather *aḥādīth* never ceased to be in circulation and to have meaning beyond any one setting a compiler put them in – their centrifugal meaning as Burge puts it.<sup>566</sup> Even as compilers' carefully ordered their works, they knew full well of readers' capacity to ignore their efforts, to dip in at random or to seek out particular texts at the expense of all the rest.

This might leave compilers looking frustrated, but that is not the emphasis which the preceding readings have suggested. Rather it should alert us to compilation's inherent capacity to keep the author's agency below the surface, out of sight of the reader. It is not simply the case that the reader might miss the structures of meaning that compilers create, rather it is frequently the case that these structures are more effective when this occurs. Compilers, especially compilers of *ḥadīth*, know that their agency more often than not remains concealed behind the greater authority of the words that they transmit, and use this to their advantage. This has been observed of other compilers,<sup>567</sup> and we have seen it here time again in al-Ṣadūq's writing. Al-Ṣadūq knows that his books will be read in search of the imāms rather than in search of him, indeed he vigorously encourages that it should be so. This reflects an epistemological ideal, but also an authorial reality, a capacity of which he is aware and makes continuous use to hide in the deafening sanctity of the imāms' voices, quietly affecting his readers in ways they will not notice.

## COMPILATIONS, CRITICISM AND THE LITERARY

As we began this thesis it was tentatively asked whether or not the compilations under discussion might be counted as literature. To do so leads us with seeming inevitability towards a lengthy discussion of what literature is and what it might, in turn be in Buwayhid Rayy. This need not, I think, be the case. *Ḥadīth* compendia, it is clear, respond to what we call literary criticism with rich results. Indeed, we have demonstrated that a failure to appreciate this can lead to deeply misleading readings of these texts and of what their authors meant by them.

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<sup>566</sup> Burge, 'Myth', p. 216-221ff.

<sup>567</sup> Tokatly, pp. 60, 87, Burge, 'Jalāl al-Dīn', p. 299, Hodgson, vol. i, pp. 353-358.

Certainly it may be said of al-Ṣadūq's kaleidoscopic image of the Hidden Imām in *Kamāl al-dīn*, or his theology-collapsing illustrations of the majesty of God in *al-Tawḥīd*, that these go far beyond the simple, unambiguous functionality of the catechism, a progression that may well lead closer to a classification as literature by some reckonings. There is no question, however, of suggesting that these texts were read by al-Ṣadūq or any of his contemporaries on the same terms as poetry or ornamented epistolary prose.

This is no cause for taxonomical alarm. Rather than dwell on how the literary character of compilations' form may relate to other forms of a (perhaps more or less) literary character, it is more pertinent to dwell on how this fact effects how we view their contents. If compilations are necessarily apprehended as literary, this holds for the ideas that they convey. *Kamāl al-dīn* is not readily distilled to a set of abstract doctrines about the Hidden Imām, nor indeed are *al-Tawḥīd*'s on free will and predestination. Their voluminous amassings of *aḥādīth* are not simply probative fuel for one or two lines of theological prose. This is not to deny that al-Ṣadūq set down simple formulations of these doctrines in other works. Just as the dialectic theologian may elaborate on simple statements of creed with lengthily and intricately argued proofs, so in these compilations al-Ṣadūq expands on and develops his basic convictions. Compilations being as they are, however, the way these doctrines are developed therein is substantially a literary one. *Kamāl al-dīn*'s pool of molten images *is* al-Ṣadūq's view of the Hidden Imām as set down in this text. Similarly, *al-Tawḥīd*'s long iteration *is* his understanding the tension between text and reason. A literary view of compilation bids us consider a correspondingly discursive view of such doctrines, embedded in the negotiations, representations and deceptions at work between compilers and their readers.

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